De Profundis

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1315789.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Abigail Hobbs, Alana Bloom, Beverly Katz, Freddie Lounds
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Dubious Consent, Cannibalism, Of Course There's Cannibalism, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Manipulation, Because Hannibal is a Manipulative Bastard, Possessive Hannibal, Alpha Hannibal, Omega Will, Angst, Sleepwalking, Nightmares, Someone Help Will Graham, No Encephalitis At Least, But the Symptoms Are Still There For Other Reasons, Mpreg, Autistic Will Graham, Headcanoned Though Not Explicitly Stated In the Fic
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Who, O Lord, Shall Stand?
Collections:	Hannigram Bonanza, Fine Fanfic, Read Again They Were Good (clayrin), Fics That I Like 🥰🤩⭐, *chef's kisses*, favoriatehannigramstories, Cannibals In Love, Bugalicous Library
Stats:	Published: 2014-03-15 Completed: 2015-09-23 Words: 88,470 Chapters: 30/30

De Profundis

by AGlassRoseNeverFades

Summary

He was in love from the moment he stepped foot into Hobbs' kitchen and saw the Omega standing there, chest heaving, pulse racing, spattered in the blood of an inferior Alpha. He had vowed to himself then and there that he would have Will, whatever the cost to the profiler's sanity and to the lives of others.

An Omegaverse story in which male Omegas are considered rare and precious according to society's standards. Hannibal decides he wants Will and is ready to start a family with him, regardless of whatever Will wants.

Starts in Oeuf but doesn't diverge too drastically from canon until Savoureux.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 【翻译】De Profundis 自深深处 by deardeer

Chapter 1

“I suspect that fruit is on a very high branch, very difficult to reach.”

“So’s my mother,” says Graham. “Never knew her.”

Lecter leans forward, seemingly unconsciously, though nothing he does is ever anything but meticulously planned. “An interesting place to start,” is all that he says.

The profiler avoids answering his unasked questions, deflects by asking about Hannibal’s past instead. Hannibal answers, putting the puzzle together in the back of his mind on his own with the few pieces Will has given him. The fact that he claims never to have known his mother, paired with the barest hint of bitterness in his tone and a brief allusion made once before to divorce rather than another, equally likely reason for her absence—her death—tells Hannibal that the former Mrs. Graham left her husband and her child behind quite willingly while the boy was still very young.

There are so few natural obvious reasons for a mother to abandon her own child—her maternal instincts should surely war against the concept. Unless, of course, they are overridden by her very nature and even baser instincts. It becomes clear to Hannibal then. She was an Omega.

He makes some light, off-handed remarks about Abigail Hobbs, the slaughtered family Will saw at the crime scene this morning, anything to keep the younger man distracted from the triumphant smirk that threatens to grace Hannibal’s lips as the heart of one of the profiler’s many fascinating quirks finally reveals itself to him.

Since the moment he met Will, Hannibal has been utterly captivated. The man’s empathy, his vivid imagination, the startling unconscious poetry of his words were enough to capture his interest alone when he assumed the man was a Beta. Then Hannibal had sat next to him, talking of bone forts and tasteless thoughts, and leaned just a bit closer, much as he is leaning in now. Buried under the odor of cheap cologne, he had caught a whiff of the chemical tang of suppressants and an even fainter aroma that made his pupils dilate and caused his blood to sing. He still is unsure if that’s not the real reason Special Agent Graham had left the room in such a disconcerted hurry with the flimsy excuse of personal offense at being psychoanalyzed.

Male Omegas are an incredibly rare transmutation of the human species. Less than one-percent of all male children are born into the gender, and as such are highly prized to the point of almost worship and romantic idealization in modern society. Hannibal has met only one such individual before Will Graham, and the man had epitomized every outlandish fantasy and lisping stereotype projected upon him by those expectations. Delicate and feminine, blue-blooded and pedigreed, confident in his own dubious charms to the point of arrogance, and infused with the belief that his status entitled him to anything he wanted. Hannibal’s fondest memory of Verger is watching him asphyxiate himself in drug-fueled

delirium and carve up his own pretty face with a jagged shard of mirror after making yet another unwanted advance on his psychiatrist.

Will Graham is unique not only for his antisocial habits and remarkable gift for delving into the minds of others, but for the way he deliberately bucks against whatever others expect of him because of his gender as well. While his manners and lack of aristocratic gentility can perhaps be explained away by his impoverished background, the loose-fitting flannel and jeans, glasses, and stubble that serve to imperfectly disguise his natural Omegan beauty cannot. It's not that Will Graham actively hides his gender per se—such things are a matter of public record, after all, and lying about it serves no real purpose in this more-or-less age of equality. It's simply that he never talks about it and never bothers to correct those who assume he is a Beta.

Will opens up enough to talk a little about his childhood, his father and boatyards and lake boats on Eerie, and from these things and the things William doesn't say, Hannibal is able to piece together the man Graham Sr. must have been in the boy's formative years. A Beta, it almost goes without saying. Nothing Will says about the man strikes Hannibal as particularly Alpha or Omegan, and he knows from various psychological studies that children of single parents often have a tendency growing up to unconsciously mirror the attitudes and actions of that parent even across gender lines. A loving enough father perhaps, but broken-hearted and overwhelmed by the task of raising his son on his own after his Omegan wife jilted her family to form another with someone else.

He knows without being told that Will believes his mother refused custody and abandoned him with his father in order not to offend the Alpha she chose to mate with, and decided against bringing along her first child from a previous 'inferior' marriage. Sadly, he is probably right. It entertains Hannibal for a moment to consider whether or not she might have made the same choice had she known that Will would turn out to be an Omega like her. While physical sex is known sometimes as early as thirteen weeks in the womb, it is almost impossible to determine a child's gender until they hit puberty.

"Always the new boy at school," Hannibal prods. "Always the stranger."

"Always," says Will with that awkward twist of his lips that isn't exactly a smile, or certainly not a happy one. Hannibal imagines the isolation Will must have felt growing up, a feeling that would only have gotten worse in adolescence as his body betrayed him and caused him to develop differently from the other boys, closer in biology to the mother who rejected him than the father who raised him.

"You said it was difficult for you to connect to the concept of family," Hannibal nudges further, deciding a more direct approach is needed to test the waters and see how far he can push Will in the direction he wants. "Have you ever considered starting one of your own?"

Will's laugh is like his smile—harsh, hollow, and quickly gone. "I take it we're not talking about my dogs or Abigail Hobbs anymore, Doctor Lecter," he says. He leans forward, a wry smirk on his face. "Are you suggesting I find a nice strong Alpha to take care of me and settle down?" His accent deepens just slightly on the last sentence and sounds oddly more Mississippi than Louisiana. Hannibal surmises that he's quoting an old teacher or neighbor who suggested exactly that to him when he was younger. He's probably heard it often since.

“Does the idea offend you?” Hannibal asks with an amused smile of his own.

“What offends me is the idea that I need help looking out for myself.”

“I am not questioning your ability to look after your own wellbeing. Though perhaps I would question your willingness to do so properly, considering it may require you to take a step back from the dark places Jack forces you to go.” He raises his hand in a silencing, conciliatory gesture when Will seems about to speak again. “But that is a conversation for another day. You are avoiding my actual question, William.”

Will breathes out a sigh and squeezes his eyes shut. He hates it when Lecter calls him William; it’s too formal and makes him feel put on the spot. “I don’t know,” he says finally without opening them.

“Something to think about, to reflect upon in greater depth when you are not so caught up in the minds of others,” says a voice directly behind him. Will jumps. His eyes fly open and he cranes his neck to look up at Hannibal, who looks directly down at him with the same look of amusement as before, his hand resting lightly on the back of Will’s chair.

“Christ, I didn’t even hear you get up,” says Will. Hannibal’s eyes gleam even brighter and Will can’t help the sheepish grin that spreads across his own face.

“My apologies,” murmurs Hannibal, coming around the other side and offering his hand to help Will out of his chair. His fingers brush the Omega’s wrist and he can feel the pulse underneath quicken a bit as he helps the younger man stand. He hides another soft smile as he leads the man out of his office.

Will himself seems unaware of his own reaction, a tragic irony of sorts. The man has a gift for understanding the motivations of others that borders on profound, yet he remains oblivious to his own desires and needs. More than ever, Hannibal is convinced that he is doing the right thing by coaxing him further into the darkness where Hannibal resides, slowly revealing the empath’s true nature to himself little by little. Cultivating him into a beautiful creature of blood and shadow, into *Hannibal’s perfect mate.*

It’s a fantasy Hannibal has toyed with the idea of implementing into reality, not from the very moment he met Will, but certainly not long after as the empath began to intrigue him more and more. With every interaction, Will opens himself up a little more to the good doctor, and Hannibal savors every new sliver of insight, never sated, always hungry. He knows he is obsessed and he does not care. If anything, he delights in the knowledge that Will brings this out in him, that he is the only one who can. He was in love from the moment he stepped foot into Hobbs’ kitchen and saw the Omega standing there, chest heaving, pulse racing, spattered in the blood of an inferior Alpha. He had vowed to himself then and there that he would have Will, whatever the cost to the profiler’s sanity and to the lives of others.

Their conversations are already doing a marvelous job of breaking down Will’s barriers and chipping away at his mind, but Hannibal’s plan will work best if he can turn the Omega’s body against him as well. For that, he will now have only to wait.

It had been an easy thing, after feeding Will's dogs that morning and peering into cupboards and drawers while wandering the quaint little house, to find the bottle of heat suppressants tucked neatly away in the medicine cabinet and carefully tamper with its contents.

He didn't replace them all with placebos. The effect would be too quick, too sudden and suspicious, and the last thing he wanted was for Will to go unexpectedly into an overpowering heat while possibly in an area overcrowded by other Alphas, such as a crime scene or the FBI Academy. Instead he replaces the majority of the pills with others from the same pharmaceutical company, same color and size but with varying dosages, a few of which are inert or so low in active ingredients as to be negligible in their physiological influence.

The results will be interesting, to say the least. He hums a little to himself while he waits for his next patient, Strings Serenade No. 13, his heart thrumming with anticipation as he pictures the beautiful wreck Will will become over the next several weeks. His emotions will be haywire, hormones fluctuating so rapidly he won't trust himself to know down from up anymore, and most importantly, he won't be receiving the proper amount of treatment he needs to actually keep his heats in check.

He will have no one but his caring and compassionate psychiatrist-turned-friend to turn to for comfort and support. Hannibal will make sure of it.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's letting his mind drift, thinking back on Hannibal's words as they reconstruct the profile following the discovery of the Frist family.

"Have you ever considered starting one of your own?"

No. Yes. What the hell kind of question is that anyway? *A perfectly valid one*, says a treacherous part of his brain, *especially considering your age.* He doesn't exactly have youthful disinterest as an excuse anymore.

He honestly doesn't know. He's never allowed himself to think much about the future outside of the lens of his career. Never stopped to wonder if he's actually content with it just being him and the dogs indefinitely or if there isn't some stupid wish buried in his subconscious for an Alpha to swoop in and knock him up so he doesn't have to live alone anymore.

The problem with that is he doesn't date Alphas. Ever. He doesn't date at all anymore really, but whenever he has in the past it's mostly been Beta or Omega women, or occasionally a Beta male. Never an Alpha.

And therein lies the rub. He can't have kids with a woman. Male Omegan sperm is sterile; his only viable means of reproduction is in childbearing himself. Because of the differences in his physiology, he can't get pregnant by a male Beta like an Omegan woman can either. His only option if he ever decides he wants children is to be with an Alpha and that…is not happening.

If asked, he wouldn't know how to explain his reticence to the idea without coming across as irrational or absurd. *Probably because it is irrational and absurd,* he thinks. He just hates the idea of giving up his independence and handing the reins over to someone else.

He knows logically that his fear is unfounded—Omegan rights have made leaps and strides forward since the days when they could be smacked around or forced by their mates to quit their jobs while everyone else turned a blind eye. It's not that so much as it is a myriad of other little things that bothers him. Domineering, controlling behavior on some level is still a completely acceptable and defining characteristic of Alpha personalities.

He deals with that enough on a day-to-day basis because of his work to know that it's not something he wants to put up with in his personal life. Jack says jump, Will has to jump—he doesn't even get to ask how high because all that would earn him is a severe look and a gruff *"I don't pay you to question my orders, Will. Figure it out on your own."* Some of his Alpha students have even tried staring him down before and demanding a change of grade, having the utter gall to actually show surprise when he denies it to them rather than roll over and give in the way they expect.

Really, the only Alpha who doesn't make him uncomfortable or tick him off by trying to take charge of any situation where Will is involved is Doctor Lecter. It's the only reason he's fine with continuing their sessions, that and the man's invaluable insights whenever they discuss a case.

No, he doesn't think he's ready for kids anytime in the near future, if ever. The thought leaves a sour taste in his mouth and makes him think of disapproving peers and elderly women back home who would tell him he was wasting the 'precious miracle' of his body instead of doing what he was 'meant' to do. Right, because what better purpose could he *possibly have* than to serve as a glorified baby-making factory, and thank you ever so much by the way for *completely invalidating* all the work that he does and the lives that he saves.

He thinks some of his agitation must be showing on his face, because Jack looks at him sternly and says, "Will, are you still with us?"

"Yeah, I'm here, Jack," he says waspishly. Just because his mind is on other things doesn't mean he's too distracted to do his job well.

Jack seems to disagree. The look hardens at Will's tone, then retreats as his gaze becomes more assessing. Whatever he sees makes him sigh as he loses some internal debate and says, "Go home, Will. I've got all I need from you today."

"Jack—"

"Go," he repeats firmly, and the harsh glare returns. He turns his back without another word and walks to where Price and Zeller are debating glibly about something over the charred husk of Connor Frist.

Beverly looks up at the Omega from a sample she's analyzing. "It's alright, Will. We've got this," she says lightly to defuse some of the tension.

Will bites back a sigh of his own and rubs at his temple where he can feel a headache forming. "Yeah, fine," he says, and takes great care not to slam the door to the lab behind him like he wants to when he leaves.

He's still agitated while he's behind the wheel later, and without thinking about it on the way home, he detours and pulls into the parking lot of an outdoor sports and recreation shop.

He browses the aisles there for awhile in hopes of clearing his head, thinking about the supplies he might need to pick up before his next fishing trip if he ever gets enough time off for one again. What catches his eye instead is a magnifying glass like the one he already has at home and a beginner's set of fly-tying gear.

He asks the clerk if she could giftwrap it while she rings it up at the register.

"Sure, all we have is plain brown wrap, nothing fancy. Is that okay?" she asks.

Will nods. He doesn't really care what it looks like. He pays and tries not to fidget as she starts wrapping.

“So, got a little one at home who’s ready to learn how to fish like dad?” she asks without looking up, a sweet, sincere smile on her face.

Something in his chest seizes at the question. “Uh…no,” he almost stammers. “No, I don’t. It’s for…someone else.”

She nods in response, still smiling, and hands it to him. He feels strangely panicked once it’s in his grasp and is suddenly tempted to hand it right back to her and ask for a refund. Instead he clutches it to his chest, mumbles a thank you to the countertop between them, and hurries out of the store.

As soon as he gets to the car, he sets it down in the passenger seat and stares at it. His fingers drum the wheel frantically as he wonders what he’s going to do now, tries to figure out what the hell he was even thinking buying it in the first place. He wants to bang his head into the driver’s side window a few times to see if that will knock any better sense into him. He doesn’t.

After a few more minutes of pointless staring and self-beratement, he shoves the thing roughly into his bag, starts the engine, and heads to Baltimore.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank every single person who has commented, bookmarked, or left kudos on Chapter One. I never expected this kind of a response, and frankly I'm overwhelmed in a really awesome, squeeing-and-dancing-around-in-the-living-room-like-a-crazy-person kind of way. *Thank you!!*

On another note, I didn't realize until I started this chapter that by writing Will as someone who dates Betas and even Omegas, but not Alphas, I may have technically, accidentally begun writing a "Will is gay but Hannibal is trying to turn him straight" story. That's just...I mean I can't even...Wow. **facepalms** Omegaverse, man. xD

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will appears to be rather distressed as he paces the waiting room to Hannibal's office. It's a wonderful look on him. Even better, he knows it's all Will since the pills couldn't possibly be having an effect on him yet.

"Will, do come in," he says, holding the door open. He represses the urge to grab or inhale too deeply at the accidental brush of contact as the profiler moves past him.

The man tosses his bag onto the couch without a care. A plainly wrapped package pokes out of it, piquing Hannibal's interest.

"What is this?" he asks, letting one finger run smoothly down the coarse, cheap paper without picking it up.

Will tells him. When his only response is a single quirked eyebrow, the profiler huffs and rubs a hand over his face in shame as he explains further, "It was a gift for Abigail."

"Was?"

"I thought better of it," Will snaps. He winces at his own tone and tries to soften it. "I wasn't thinking straight. I was upset when I bought it," he says. *Your fault,* he almost wants to add, except that would be childish and unfair, not to mention rude. *"Maybe still am,"* he finishes in a troubled, nearly singsong tone of voice.

Truth be told, he hadn't known for sure when he headed towards Baltimore if he was going to see Abigail or Lecter until he wound up standing outside the man's office. He's grateful he chose the latter.

Hannibal is immensely pleased by this turn of events. Already, his probing words are having the desired effect by making Will question himself on things he never considered before. That Will thought to come here to seek the psychiatrist's steadying presence speaks volumes on its own.

However, Hannibal mustn't get too far ahead of himself and risk showing his hand too soon. Will is not yet ready for him. He is not even cognizant of the layers to their relationship that lay beneath the polite and professional tenor of their conversations. The Omega still maintains a cautious distance whenever possible, unaware of the razor-sharp talons hovering inches over his skin, itching for the opportunity to dig in and claw deep, never letting go.

It's just as well, Hannibal decides. He certainly doesn't want to scare his boy into trying to run. It's far too early in the game for Will to realize he's already in checkmate. Better for now that he remains ignorant of the fact that they're playing at all.

“Pretty paternal, Will,” he says, cautiously sliding one of his pieces further across the board.

“Aren’t you?” the younger man retorts sharply. If it were anyone else, Hannibal would already be making plans to slice out the tongue, baste it in oil, and shove it down the speaker’s own throat. Will’s belligerence has its own sort of charm, however, and leaves Hannibal feeling indulgent.

“Yes,” he answers honestly. The way it makes Will stop in his tracks and turn to stare at him, albeit no higher than his chin, is unquestionably worth it.

“Tell me what has you so upset, my friend.” There, another chink in the armor, even if the other doesn’t so much as blink to show that he notices, probably thinks of it as nothing more than merely a cordial affectation. No matter, he will learn in time the care with which Hannibal chooses his words, feel their full weight and the implications of his gaze. He has the utmost confidence in Will’s empathic ability, enough to know that even his own flawless mask will not be able to withstand it forever. The thought is far more gratifying than it is humbling, filling him with pride and esteem for his chosen mate.

“Nothing. It’s just…” he trails off, hands both gesturing outwards, away from him, towards *everything.*

Will rakes a tired hand through his hair, gaze planted firmly at his feet. “These boys,” he begins, then stops himself, not sure how to continue. He bites his lip. “These boys,” he tries again. “They’re…they’re destroying something that they can never get back. I don’t know what we’re going to do when we find them, what can *possibly be done.* There’s nothing I can do to help them. I can’t give them back what they just *gave away.”* He says the last few sentences in a breathless rush, his voice catching at the very end. He hadn’t realized how much this was bothering him until he said it out loud.

“Family,” says Hannibal delicately.

Will nods. “Yeah. We call them the lost boys,” he says.

“Are you feeling lost yourself, Will? Or do you perhaps find the concept has more meaning to you than you originally thought?”

Will looks up from his shoes and settles his gaze on Lecter’s paisley silk tie. “It’s not that it didn’t have meaning before,” he says. “It’s just…not something I can picture myself having,” he admits quietly.

“It’s not wrong to want something, Will,” Hannibal pitches his voice just as softly.

“Isn’t it?” Will asks with a huff of unhappy laughter that is uniquely his. He knows what he is and what he isn’t. He is not the sort of man who gets to ever have what he wants. He wouldn’t trust himself not to screw it up somehow anyway.

Sitting down finally, he rolls his shoulders and lolls his head back a bit, trying to ease some of the tension out of his muscles and baring his throat unconsciously for the other man.

Hannibal drinks it in, wondering if Will has any idea how vulnerable and lovely he looks, how lusciously *Omegan* the unwitting gesture makes him appear.

How badly Hannibal wants to run lips and tongue and teeth over the pale expanse of flesh, biting and marking as he goes.

It's a testament to his ironclad control when he merely sits in his usual seat across from the empath and leans back, continuing the rest of their session sedately and giving nothing away of the predator vibrating within.

*

She buys them all milkshakes when it's done, wants her boys to know how good of a job they did, how proud of them all she is for sticking to the plan, for being so brave and strong even after the awfulness that happened because of their brother.

The unpleasant image stays with her long into the afternoon, the boys chatting away happily about video games and horsing around with each other while she mourns him quietly.

She hadn't wanted to kill Connor. She never wants any of her boys to suffer, to know sorrow and loneliness so gaping and wide it threatens to swallow them whole. But Connor had refused to listen, and she has to set an example for the others to follow. Mind your mother, and you'll be rewarded and loved and nothing bad will ever happen. Disobey, and you will be punished.

She allows herself to be cheered by the boys' laughter and smiling faces. Christopher seems nervous and she tries to comfort him. She knows he's scared and she doesn't want that. She wants him to understand why this is necessary, why it's so important that they do this together. As a family.

She is so afraid of what may happen next, that Christopher will disobey as Connor had done. She can't let that happen. She won't lose another son. She won't allow this family she's forged to unravel and drift apart from her open and loving arms.

Nothing will stand in the way of what is rightfully hers now that it's finally within her grasp. Nothing will tear her family apart.

Nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Come on now, Will. We don't bare our pretty Omegan necks in front of hungry, smitten Alphas no matter how trustworthy they seem. You know better than this. xD

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It isn't clear to Will why Alana is also here as they go over the case files and evidence in the lab once more, but he's too grateful for the other Omega's calming presence to question it too deeply. He wouldn't be surprised if that's part of the reason she's here. Alana's good at that, seeming somehow to always know when she's needed. She's like a cool, soothing balm over an ugly and burning wound.

Odd as her presence may be, it's also staggeringly helpful to have a fresh perspective on the team for once. He mostly leaves her and the three Betas in the room to do all the talking, only giving occasional input as needed. Bev chats away just the same as she normally would, but Price and Zeller are unusually well-behaved for once.

Will wonders if that has anything to do with the way Alana can make anyone she's talking to feel like they're the only person in the room, or simply the way dark chocolate waves of her hair occasionally fall into her face and cause her to daintily reach up with a finger to tuck it back behind her ear.

Will snorts into his coffee at the thought and has to disguise it as a minor choking fit. Alana stops in the middle of whatever she's saying to Zeller to rub gentle circles over his back and ask him if he's alright.

"Easy now, cowboy, don't drink it so fast," says Beverly, and Will grins at her wryly. He nearly blushes when he realizes Alana's hand is still on his back, and she drops it quickly as though she too has just noticed. Brian looks like he's trying desperately not to glare at Will and draws the conversation back to what Alana was saying before.

It's moments like this that confuse Will the most, when he's not sure what he feels more—jealous of the way Alana can command a room with her perfectly lovely Omegan looks and manners that epitomize everything their gender should represent, grateful he can't because it means he doesn't get subjected to all the barely contained ogling Betas like Zeller and Alphas too numerous to name throw her way, or warm and flustered whenever Alana focuses all of her attention on him.

Terms like 'lost boys' and 'brothers' get bandied about a few more times in the conversation, and Alana's face turns mildly considering. "Brothers looking for a mother," she says quietly.

The comment gets lost as the four of them continue discussing other theories, but Will is no longer listening. Something clicks into place at Alana's throwaway phrasing and he stands, forgetting his coffee cup and ignoring the way the others look at him and ask what's up as he abruptly leaves the lab.

He doesn't bother to knock, just bursts into Jack's office and says without preamble, "There's an adult with some formidable sway. It's a woman…a mother figure, I think." Jack

straightens in his seat at this bit of news and seems to hold back whatever he might have been about to say.

"She's looking to form a family," Will finishes a little breathlessly.

Jack nods, starting to see it. "Family can have a contagion effect on some people," he says. "Influences them to adopt similar behaviors and attitudes."

Before Jack can say anything more, Will is waving a hand at him in a vague silencing gesture, as if to say *Wait, give me a moment.* "Whoever this woman is," he continues as though Jack never spoke, "she wants these children to *burst* with love for her."

A kind of love no one else would ever give her. He closes his eyes. The pendulum swings. *Lonely, so terribly lonely. So many pitying looks. No one could ever give her what she needs.*

"She's an Alpha," he says suddenly, opening his eyes.

Jack furrows his brows. "An Alpha? Are you sure?"

"Jack, it's the only thing that makes sense," says Will, impatient because Jack *doesn't see it.* "She…she can't have children of her own," he tries to explain. It's so *obvious* once he puts it all together.

"She's desperate to have a family to accept her for who she is," he says. Alpha women are about as uncommon as Omegan men, but all too often they're cast as more of an accident of nature than a blessing. Barren due to a lack of ovaries, yet unable to get an Omega pregnant because they also lack certain other…anatomical parts, a female Alpha is something to be pitied rather than revered.

Pair that with a desperate desire for the unobtainable, add a dash of disappointed relatives and rejection from prospective suitors, false sympathy at best from onlookers, or scathing repulsion at worst, all in a pressure cooker of Alpha pheromones without a release, and there you have it. All the ingredients needed for a killer with a grudge against women who have obtained the one thing she can never have. *Motherhood*.

"So we're looking for an Alpha woman traveling alone with three boys," says Jack. "That narrows things down considerably. I've got some calls to make. Get the others, I want to be out of here in twenty."

Will is out the door before Jack is finished pulling his phone out of his pocket.

*

"Shoot him, Christopher," she says, her Alpha pheromones crackling dangerously around her and making the statement an undeniable command.

"Christopher, *please,"* Will pleads. "Put the gun down. You don't have to do this anymore." His own pheromones are curling unconsciously outward as well, trying to soothe and pacify. He would probably be a little surprised at himself, at the softness of his own voice, if this wasn't such a tense situation.

The look she gives Will when his scent reaches her is one of the most hateful and monstrous he has ever received. *Even you,* it seems to say. *Even a* man *for god's sake. You can have what I can't. You think you're better than me too, don't you?*

Will ignores it to focus on the frightened and confused boy in front of her. "Chris, it's okay. You're home now. Your family's here. You're safe."

He sees the way her gun hand twitches as he says it. *(No, I'm his family, I am, I AM!)* He knows before she does that it's about to shift up, aim straight for his head instead of Chris O'Halloran's.

That's the only opening Beverly needs to take her shot.

He rushes forward almost as quickly as Bev does to take Christopher's hand. She looks at him strangely for a second and then nods, lets Will be the one to take charge of him.

He lingers overlong for a moment when he catches the bleeding woman's eyes. There's so much sorrow there, so much *envy* of Will. It's not a feeling he's used to having directed at him. There's something oddly humbling about that.

He tears himself away from it long enough to wrap an arm around Chris's shoulders and steer him away from the poolside.

"Will," says Jack when they reach the front yard. There's a gentle weariness to the Alpha's face that isn't usually there when he says, "I can take him from here, Will."

Will looks down at the boy next to him. With something like a reassuring smile and a nod, he releases his arm around Chris and directs him to go to Jack.

"Come on, son," says Jack quietly, and with a flicker of uncertainty the boy glances between the two of them, then takes Jack's hand and follows him to the car.

Will shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath. Today is a huge success. They saved this boy from doing what he came here to do and rescued his family. So why does Will feel like crying?

He drives home, and on the way there, he thinks of Abigail.

Chapter End Notes

Geez, did I really just spend four chapters on *one episode?* xD Well, the pace should really pick up from here on out at least. I needed to drag this case out a bit to lay some groundwork for the rest of the story, tone-wise. Expect things to move a bit quicker here on out. :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It's stress, Will. Nothing more," Hannibal reassures. With a touch of friendly concern, he adds, "And certainly nothing less. You push yourself too hard. This sort of thing was bound to happen as a result of the work Jack has been putting you through."

Sleepwalking can also be a possible side effect of fluctuations in brain activity caused by hormonal imbalance, but Hannibal has no intention of telling Will this. It's fascinating to see how strongly a few simple alterations to Will's heat-suppressing medication can affect the inner workings of his mind. His imagination no doubt exacerbates the problem, and not for the first time, Hannibal wishes Will would open up to him enough to tell him what sort of breathtaking vision could drive him miles out from his home, barefoot, senseless and shivering in the cold.

Will waves a hand dismissively, as if he could bat away his psychiatrist's words like buzzing flies. He is in no mood to hear another speech from another Alpha about his line of work and the effect it may have on his 'delicate frame of mind,' even if this particular Alpha is more considerate and understanding than most. He suspects the good doctor is far more *old school* in some of his ideas about Omegan rights than he lets on, and is simply too polite or too good at his job to tell him so.

If Lecter were anything like any other Alpha he's ever met, Will would be worried about the kind of message he's sending, rushing to the man's home at the first sign of distress in the early hours of the morning and standing alone with him in his kitchen. Everything down to the way Lecter stands, comfortably poised and regal even in his pajamas, and slides a cup of espresso across the countertop to Will screams out like the beginning of a bad romance novel.

Goodness me, he thinks with an over-embellished drawl deeper than his own accent, *and not a chaperone in sight.*

Damn it. He really needs to stop making himself laugh while holding scalding hot cups of coffee.

He hisses slightly at the trickle that runs down his fingers and sets his cup down, gratefully accepting the towel Hannibal passes to him and wiping his hand quickly before it can drip onto the pristine countertop. He's still wearing an easy grin despite the fact that his fingers now sting with remembered pain.

"What has you so amused?" asks Hannibal, a light smile tugging at the corners of his own lips. This is the first time he's seen Will in genuine good humor, much less heard an honest laugh, since he called him Jack's fragile little teacup. He wishes to see it more often.

"Ah, *heh heh,"* he breathes out, a few more chuckles escaping before he can stop himself. His cheeks feel flush as much with embarrassment at being called out for it as amusement.

“It’s, um, it’s nothing,” he hedges.

Hannibal just quirks an eyebrow at him, disbelieving, and for some reason even that is enough to make Will have to press his lips together in a thin line to keep more from escaping. He’s almost successful at it.

Finally he releases the rest, more shaky exhalations of breath than throaty chuckles anymore. “It’s just *this,* this whole situation,” he says, hands spanning out to mean the entire kitchen, the two of them. *“Us.”*

“Ah.” Hannibal’s own smile widens in understanding. He says nothing more about it, urges Will to finish his coffee before it grows cold while he goes upstairs to change, comes around the younger man to give his shoulder a friendly pat and squeeze it once good-naturedly before turning to leave the room.

If his hand lingers a touch overlong, fades to something more like a light trailing caress as he pulls it away, Will is too busy smiling into his beverage to notice.

*

Moments like that one, shared laughter and warmth in the company of someone he can come to consider a friend, are so few and far between as it is *normally,* that as things get progressively worse over the next couple of weeks, it’s one of the only bright spots he has to focus on to carry him through the dark days.

Days like today.

“I see what you are,” says the self-lacerated corpse of Elliot Buddish, aka the Angel-Maker. He takes a stumbling step forward, causing Will to take a step back and reach for his gun. A frightening and familiar huff of hot breath tickles the back of his neck. He spins around, expecting to find the stag from his nightmares, perhaps finally ready to end its passive game of hide-and-seek and shatter his world with blood and violence, goring him at last on its sharp, spiraling antlers.

There is nothing behind him.

Clammy, blood-streaked hands grab him by the shoulders, twisting the fabric of his shirt and staining it. He cries out.

“See,” says Buddish, and the voice of Garrett Jacob Hobbs comes out of his bloated blue lips instead of his own. His eyes have gone milky white.

“You coming or what, Will?” Jack strides back into the barn to bark gruffly at him.

Will blinks. Buddish is gone, back to hanging in the rafters exactly as they found him. Will’s shirt is clean.

“Jack, I…” he begins, but quickly realizes he has no idea what to say. He doesn’t want to tell Jack what just happened, that he’s going *completely crazy.*

“You what?” *This better be damned important,* everything about his tone and posture says.

“I…I don’t think I can do this anymore,” he tries to say, but Jack is having none of it. He gives some bitter, angry, impassioned speech that Will is barely able to listen to. He *yells* at Will, and Will can only be grateful when the irate Alpha storms out, his body choosing for him not a moment later to let out a pitiful Omegan whine that he would rather die than let Jack hear.

Suddenly he’s on his hands and knees on the dusty barnyard floor, his entire frame wracked with sobs, and he doesn’t even understand *why,* just knows that he wants *out,* he wants to go *home,* he wants someone to hold him and tell him it’s alright and make him feel better, he wants, he wants…

He wants to see Hannibal.

He kneels there until he can breathe normally again and uses the sleeves of his jacket to wipe the wetness from his eyes. Hannibal will understand what’s happening to him, will know how to explain it and help him figure out what’s going on. He needs to see his friend *now.*

He stands and barely thinks to brush the dirt off his pants before he steps outside. Jack is some distance away now, talking to some of the other agents who’ve just arrived. Will avoids him and makes a beeline for one of the local officers parked nearby, feeds him some bullshit line about feeling sick and asks if someone could take him back to the station so he can get his car.

A few minutes later, he’s in the passenger seat of a patrol vehicle, ignoring the way Jack’s eyes follow as it pulls out onto the dirt road.

Chapter End Notes

> That moment when you try to friendzone someone without even knowing you're doing it, but instead of getting hurt feelings he just shakes his head at you secretly and thinks *"Oh, Will,"* like he knows something you don't. 0_0
>
> Poor Will. I actually wanted to reach out and hug him after I wrote this. Think Hannibal would shank me if I tried?

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal remains silent for about a minute after Will finishes speaking, allowing the empath a moment of quiet reflection. The expression on his face is a careful blend of sympathy and concern, not that Will is likely to see it anytime soon. His head is bent downward, gaze fixed firmly on his own fingers as they pick at a loose thread on the cuff of his sleeve.

“This is not the first time you have come to me with news of such a vision,” he says, thinking of the apparition of Hobbs that Will saw in Stammets’ mushroom garden. While true, they both know it doesn’t hold a candle to what Will saw today. Another sign of the pills exacerbating something that already exists in Will, the worst known side effects of his unconventional ‘treatment’ rising to the surface because of his own overactive and deliciously morbid mind.

Will stands abruptly, something like anger and resentment making an appearance on his features, mixing in with his previous anxiety but not dissipating it. He storms a few feet away to the bookshelves, his back turned rather rudely on the Alpha. “Are we still calling this stress, *Doctor?”* he asks bitingly, spinning around to face him again when the titles in front of him fail to capture his attention.

Hannibal sighs. “At the moment, I am unsure what to call it, Will.”

Will’s stiff posture crumbles at that, his brief hostility fading in an instant. His feet shuffle awkwardly back in Hannibal’s direction, stopping before they reach the chairs as though he can bring himself no farther, too ashamed of his outburst to come too near and risk seeing the ire almost certainly written on the other man’s face. As impassive as it usually is, Will is getting pretty good at picking up on the minute changes in expression the more he spends time around his friend.

He drops down onto the chaise lounge he normally so despises instead, leaning back and pulling his feet up so he can curl in on his side and clutch at the side with both hands, laying his cheek against it as well. It makes him look and feel exactly as much like a child as he expected it would, but he’s past caring at this point anymore.

“What’s happening to me?” he asks desperately, turning his head to bury his face into the cushions when he hears how his voice nearly cracks. *Don’t cry,* he thinks. Not now, not here, not *fucking again.*

God, when did he become so pathetic? The only thing that can be called a bright side in all this is that at least Hannibal has probably seen it all and worse before. Will surely isn’t the first sad, neurotic little Omega to grab onto the upholstery like this for dear life, and he’s certain he won’t be the last. It’s a cold comfort, but better that than no comfort at all.

Hannibal rises from his seat, unable to resist coming closer to the gorgeous display laid out before him a moment longer. He lets his eyes roam over Will's bent form and drink in their fill, knowing Will won't be looking up anytime soon to see it, no matter that he can certainly hear Hannibal approaching since the Alpha does nothing to muffle his footsteps.

Much as he knows he could enjoy letting Will drown a little further in his delightfully erratic mood swings, could bask in the changes to his scent in the air as he shifts rapidly from fury to anguish to low-burning melancholy in the space of a heartbeat, Hannibal would rather use this as an opportunity to make himself as necessary to Will as possible.

He sits carefully at the end of the lounge beside Will's feet. When Will makes no movement, shows no sign that he notices beyond a single quick huff of breath in and out, Hannibal gently rests his hand atop Will's ankle, in the gap of space where his pant leg has risen up slightly to reveal the top of his sock.

Will startles a little at the unexpected touch, but makes no move otherwise to pull his ankle away. Hannibal slowly starts to rub him there, languid smooth circles that tug lightly at the rough warm fabric over his skin.

Will takes yet another breath, this one long and deep, before he slowly blinks his eyes open and shifts his head so he can look down the length of his own body and watch as Hannibal's hand strokes his leg.

Normally, he's not fond of contact. He doesn't expect Hannibal's touch to feel so welcome and soothing, but it does. He relaxes into it as Hannibal keeps going.

The circles occasionally skim a bit higher, Hannibal's warm pinky finger grazing accidentally over bare skin. Will closes his eyes against it to keep from being overloaded by too much sensation at once. The unintentional brushes make him feel *real.* They make him feel grounded in the moment like nothing else has in a long time.

"Will," says Hannibal when the Omega's eyes slide shut yet again. Will swallows, opens them once more and lifts them up to look at the man's face instead of his hand. Hannibal smiles and finally stops rubbing his ankle.

The smile widens at the soft unconscious noise Will makes in the back of his throat, keening unintentionally at the loss before he can stop himself. Hannibal rewards it by gliding his hand just high enough to rest his pinky fully on Will's skin and leave it there.

"Will," he repeats, and Will's eyes finally rise high enough to meet his own for once.

"While I cannot promise to have all of the answers," he admits, "I can promise that it will get better. We are going to get through this together, you and I."

Will looks into Hannibal's eyes as he says this and feels *overwhelmed.* He doesn't know how he got so lucky, what he could have possibly done to deserve a friend like this, but he's grateful beyond words that he met Hannibal Lecter when he did. He doesn't know how he'd make it through everything he's been faced with so far without the man.

Will sits up at last. Doing so makes him have to pull his ankle away and set both feet on the ground, but he's close enough that their knees could almost brush and he's turned slightly to face Hannibal. He tries to keep looking at the man so he can say *thank you,* but the words get stuck in his throat and he has to look away, gaze falling back into his own lap. "And how are we going to manage that?" he asks instead, frustrated with himself.

"By taking it one step at a time," Hannibal says lightly. He tucks one long finger under the man's stubbled chin and tilts his head upward once more. Will's eyes widen in mild surprise and discomfort as he's forced to make eye contact again so soon.

"A simple grounding exercise to start with," says Hannibal. "Tell me precisely when you are, where you are, and who you are."

Will lets out a small nervous laugh, unsure if the man is serious or not. When Lecter merely waits and says nothing else, Will takes it to mean he's allowed to look away long enough to find the clock and says quietly, "Uh, it's 6:23 p.m."

Something about having the man's hand still resting under his chin makes him feel like he has to whisper for some reason. He clears his throat and tries again louder, "I'm in Baltimore, Maryland."

The finger under his chin strokes lightly, minutely enough that it could be an accidental twitch. Will's eyes skitter back to meet Hannibal's again automatically. "I'm…my name is Will Graham," he finishes, whispering again without meaning to.

Hannibal looks pleased. "There," he says. The hand on Will's face drops away at last. Will blinks and draws back, feeling light-headed and unsteady and not sure how that exercise was supposed to help *at all.*

"Something to draw you back to the present," says Hannibal. "When everything else becomes too much to bear."

Will nods and smiles awkwardly. He stands and wanders back to his usual chair to put on his jacket.

Hannibal walks him to the door and holds it open for him. "Until our session tomorrow," he says.

Will's smile is more genuine this time. He's happy, he thinks. What an odd concept.

"Until tomorrow," he agrees. "Good night, Dr. Lecter."

"Good evening, Will."

Chapter End Notes

cackles wickedly and flies off into the night

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will fidgets in his chair, heel tapping impatiently on the floor as they sit and wait in Jack's office. "This is a terrible idea, Jack," he repeats for the umpteenth time. Useless, he knows, but maybe if he keeps saying it, Jack will actually *listen* and put a stop to this colossal mistake that's about to occur before it can actually happen.

Jack doesn't even bother to acknowledge it, having already told Will multiple times why they needed to do this. He can understand the man's attitude. It's ugly business and Jack doesn't like it any more than Will does, but unfortunately in this case, Freddie Lounds' particular brand of expertise is an indispensable and necessary evil if they're ever going to catch the *real* Ripper.

They both look up at the knock on the door and Jack says, "Come on in." Will stands faster than Jack can as Alana enters the room. He pulls out a chair for his fellow Omega, giving a lopsided smile in answer to her own soft pretty one as she thanks him.

"Alright, I already have Lounds waiting for us in the conference room, so let's get right to it," says Jack. "Before we go in there, I want to make sure we're all clear on what information we're disclosing to Miss Lounds, what we're not disclosing, and how we're going to present this to her in a way that she won't want to refuse." He addresses this mainly for Alana's benefit, knowing how pointless it would be to expect Will to be anything other than his usual charming self in the company of his least favorite reporter.

Once they have gone over the notes and hammered out the finer details of what they're going to tell Lounds one last time, Jack leads them to a meeting room down the hall and goes in first. "Miss Lounds," he says as he walks in, the red-headed woman in question already turning to face them and striding forward to meet Jack halfway, grasping his hand in an equally self-assured handshake.

"Agent Crawford, it's good to see you again," she says with her patently false smile in place. "And Doctor…Bloom, wasn't it? I'm not sure if you remember me. We've only met once before."

"Oh, I remember," Alana says as she accepts Freddie's handshake. "At the hospital where Abigail Hobbs is staying." She manages to keep her voice pleasant and calm as she says it, but Will can see the corners of her smile gain a flinty steel edge for a moment before softening into her usual demureness.

"Such a sweet girl," says Lounds overbrightly and without feeling. "And I have to say I'm glad they picked a fellow Omega such as yourself to take charge of her therapy. Poor thing, after what happened I don't think she's altogether comfortable around Alphas just yet."

“Yet you persist in going to see her anyway,” says Will before he can stop himself. “Trying to push her out of her comfort zone, I suppose?”

“Something like that,” answers Lounds, turning her sharp smile on Will and side-stepping Alana to face him directly. “She hasn’t turned me away yet, at any rate. It’s good to see you as well, Mr. Graham,” she says, extending her hand out to Will as she had done for the others. Will doesn’t take it.

After a moment of letting it hang suspended, she drops it to her side and steps closer to him, her heels clicking loudly against the tiled floor. “Still mad at me, I see. I hope my little article didn’t hurt your feelings, Mr. Graham.”

Will’s face twists into a wry smirk that he doesn’t feel. “Oh, don’t worry about me, Miss Lounds. I’m not that fragile.”

“No, I guess not, considering what you do for a living,” she says. Will doesn’t miss the way her back straightens and her chest puffs out when she speaks to him, trying to loom intimidatingly despite her shorter height in such an obvious classical Alpha domination stance that Will might honestly be worried about her intentions toward him, if the distaste and disapproval weren’t so evident in her tone.

Will could pick her apart with his empathy, break her down to her basic components, motives, and influences within minutes if he were inclined to do so. Another female Alpha, though unlike the killer they encountered before, she made her peace with her inability to have children a long time ago. Freddie dealt with the shame and humiliation from others by throwing herself into her career instead and being utterly ruthless about it, almost aggressively and proudly exhibiting all the classic traits of her gender, trying to out-Alpha all other Alphas in the room, which was why she so often ended up butting heads with the likes of Jack Crawford.

There’s something about it that Will could almost admire her for, if she wasn’t such an unrelenting bitch.

“I’d like to get started,” says Jack, breaking Will out of his musings. “If you would all please sit.”

Will goes automatically to pull out Alana’s chair for her again, and then, because his father raised him to be a proper Southern gentleman, he walks around to the other side of the table and pulls Lounds’ chair out for her as well.

“Really, Mr. Graham, shouldn’t *I* be doing that for *you?”* she asks with a poisoned sweetness that causes Will to grit his teeth in silence as he goes to his own chair and sits down. He’s annoyed that he can’t even have *good manners* without this woman finding fault in him for it, using it as an excuse to make yet another dig about his gender and his perceived inability to fit into the proper mold for it.

Unlike his other flaws and anxieties with social interaction, however, his avoidance of all the usual hallmarks of ‘good little Omega’ behavior has always been done with deliberation and

intent. He's not going to bother explaining that to her or anyone else, however. He doesn't see much use in pointing out the distinction.

The rest of the meeting runs fairly smoothly, the continued barbs between Will and Freddie going ignored by both Jack and Alana, who are all business throughout the proceedings. It ends with them making exactly the sort of mutually beneficial arrangement they were looking for, Lounds promising to have the interview with Gideon published by tomorrow afternoon.

The whole thing leaves Will with a sour stomach and a bitter taste in his mouth, but there's no going back from this point onward. Will just hopes his buzzing instincts are wrong when they tell him that he and the others are about to unleash something cataclysmic and ever-consuming, dark and unfathomable and beyond all control.

*

Later, when his dreams are soaked in a sea of blood and his days an ever-growing mountain of bodies missing organs, when all he wants to do is scream at Jack *"I told you so!"* and bury his head under his pillow rather than face whatever the morning brings, he will look at himself in the mirror and think, *You're as much to blame for this as Jack. You took part in it. You didn't stop it. You didn't try hard enough to make them see.*

And it is Hannibal, as always, who somehow says just the right thing to pull Will's thoughts away from that darkness, at least for a little while, just long enough to remind him that there is still light in the world as well. It isn't even that he distracts Will from it, as so often their discussions are about the cases he's working on, more so now than ever it seems. It's more that the man provides a much needed counterbalance to keep him afloat when others would leave him drowning. He is Will's paddle after all, as promised.

He can't help but be struck by a sort of awe as he watches the Alpha save Devon Silvestri's last would-be victim. Maybe there is hope for Will to be saved also, if he could just learn to trust his own fate to those capable hands as well. He's not quite there yet, but he's getting there, he thinks. Already, he sees Hannibal as the closest thing he's had to a real friend in a long time.

Even with that thought in mind, he can't quite bring himself to be sociable enough to accept the man's invitation to his dinner party. He does, however, stop by a very nice shop he would never set foot in normally and purchase a bottle of wine far more expensive than even some of the nicer brands of bourbon he occasionally treats himself to at home.

Another ill-advised gift that could send entirely the wrong message, his inner voice says. Will ignores it this time. He owes the man some sort of tangible apology for not going to his party, even if he knows everyone involved would be better off without his presence, and he trusts Hannibal to know him well enough not to take it the wrong way.

Hannibal does seem very grateful for the gift when Will presents it to him, and so genuinely disappointed that he won't be attending that Will feels guilty even though he knows he wouldn't be good company for the man's other guests.

"Sorry," he says again. "But I can't. I've got a date with the Chesapeake Ripper tonight."

He doesn’t see anything flicker in Hannibal’s eyes or twitch at the corner of his lips at the strange choice of wording. Hannibal is too good at keeping such visible signs of expression from showing, though inside he nearly purrs with dark satisfaction. He longs for the day when such a statement will actually be literal and true, imagining his and Will’s wrists both sunken into a man’s torso for darker purposes than saving his life, himself leaning in to kiss away a stray smear of blood from Will’s swollen lips.

“This bottle is a good year,” he says instead as he takes it from Will’s grasp. He wishes he knew how much of the blush that creeps onto Will’s face is from the unexpected compliment to his good taste and how much of it is from the way their fingers brush during the exchange.

“Well, uh, I’ve got to go,” says Will. “Enjoy your evening.”

“And you as well, my friend.” He enjoys the way Will smiles now at the endearment, rather than shy away from it or ignore it altogether.

He watches the empath go with a smile of his own before turning back to his preparations for the feast. If the hired help assisting him in his kitchen find it strange that the smile lingers for some time afterward, they are both wise enough and professional enough not to make comment, and he does not mind allowing them to see it.

He could not be more content in this moment than if Will had actually accepted his invitation. Everything is coming together so well, and things could not be looking better.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Will, Hannibal's not your paddle. He's the sea monster dragging you deeper down into the depths below. D:

Does anyone else see Omega!Will as sort of the bra-burning type, or whatever the equivalent to that would be in the Omegaverse? Cuz in a way that's kind of what I'm picturing here. xD

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> Warning for some minor Will/Alana this chapter. (No more than what you remember from the show anyway and quickly over with, I promise!)
>
> Also, be on the lookout for a reference to a very old TV show, in the form of a gloriously lame dad joke. (You'll see what I mean soon enough.) :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He doesn't hear the first knock, the heavy pounding of his hammer against the crumbling old chimney just loud enough that it drowns it out entirely. The second knock is louder. It puts the dogs on alert and sets some of them to barking at the door immediately. Will startles, arm half-arched back in mid-swing.

He doesn't know who it could be at his door this late in the evening. A potent mixture of anxiety and dread coils in his gut. Without thinking about it, he slips into a more defensive stance as he reaches the front door, the hammer clutched tightly in his dominant hand off to the side, mostly out of sight near his waist but angled in such a way that he can swing it up with powerful, brutal force and precision if whatever is on the other side of the door tries to charge him without warning.

He opens the door and there stands…Alana Bloom. He relaxes his posture immediately, grip loosening around the hammer. He thinks with some horror about how far off the deep end he's gone in his paranoia, that he could stand there half-ready to brain *Alana,* until she asks if she can come in with that gentle smile of hers that always coaxes a similar one from him before he can stop it, no matter the turmoil churning inside of him.

She gives no indication that she notices the tensed set of his shoulders or the tool in his hand as she walks in, greeting each of the dogs in turn as they come up eagerly to be petted.

They make some small talk about the dogs, about work, about how the day went for each of them, gently easing up to the question he knows she's going to ask, as she brings herself to gaze up finally at the obvious gaping hole in his chimney. "So what's going on here?"

He sees something change in her face as he tells her, something subtle and worried that makes the anxiety from before creep back in and snag somewhere in his chest as he realizes that she doesn't believe him, that she thinks the pained, scurrying animal noises in his chimney were really all in his head, and worst of all, that she's probably *right.* He misses the calm and comfort that had started to settle under his skin earlier when she smiled and spoke to him. He wants it back.

He sets the hammer down and walks back to her slowly, as though worried she'll bolt or disappear if he comes closer too quickly. This isn't a good idea. He knows it isn't, a memory tugging unexpectedly at the corner of his brain of his father's voice, light and teasing as he calls out, *'Danger, Will Graham, danger!'* It had been a favorite joke of his father's whenever Will was about to trip up or make some stupid mistake, countering his gentle caution with levity so Will wouldn't have to feel so awkward about the rebuke. *("Son, I would have made your middle name Robinson so it fit better, but your mom vetoed it.")*

He smiles distractedly at the memory but ignores the warning underneath. He cradles Alana's cheek carefully in his hand, feeling emboldened when she doesn't pull away as he leans in.

The feel of her lips against his is every bit as soft and lovely as he imagined it would be. For a few wonderful seconds, he thinks that maybe this could actually work, that this doesn't have to be one more thing he wants only to have it slip quietly out of his grasp.

Except that's exactly what she does. After a few long moments, she puts a hand to his chest and gently steps back, want and regret both etched plainly on her face. "I can't, Will. I'm sorry."

"Why not? Because we're both Omegas?" he asks. "I didn't take you for someone so old-fashioned," he says, trying to deflect with humor and a charming smile to hide how much he wants to curl up into a corner and cover his face.

"It's because you're not…stable," she says, uncomfortable and cringing slightly at her own bluntness. Will, for his part, only bites his lip and nods in perfect understanding. That about sums up the reason for every other failure or disappointment in his life, so why not one more?

He watches her go from the front porch, letting the dogs outside to do their business so he doesn't feel so absurdly Byronic just standing there, following her car with his eyes as it pulls out of the driveway. He gives them several more minutes after her car is out of sight before he whistles for them to come inside.

*

Flattering though it may be to garner so much admiration and esteem from a potential peer, when Franklyn tells him about his friend Tobias' so-called 'fantasies' about killing—and thus unwittingly relays a message meant for the psychiatrist himself—Hannibal can only think on how tedious it will be to have to get rid of this peculiar Alpha. He has no interest in the hand of friendship Budge is extending covertly through the words of the unassuming Beta they share acquaintanceship with, nor any other form of relationship that may be on offer. There is only one individual he could ever consider worthy of partnering with him, and his plans for Will are already well underway to becoming a reality.

This other killer's interest in him is an unnecessary distraction, though he supposes it would be unspeakably rude of him to simply go to the man's music shop and put an end to it now. His serenade had been lovely, after all. Such appreciation of Hannibal's own art deserves some delicacy in the rejection. As Froideveaux continues to ramble on, unaware of his psychiatrist's inattention since the mention of the dead trombonist, Hannibal decides he will

invite this Tobias Budge to dinner and wait until after the dessert is finished to kill him. It would only be the polite thing to do.

He is not annoyed however, later, when Will's unannounced arrival on his doorstep heralds an earlier end to his evening's plans than he had expected and allows Budge an opportunity to leave with his life for one more night. Will is always his first priority above all other interests and pursuits, even, or perhaps especially, when the Omega is showing such obvious signs of distress.

He ushers Will through the dining room into his kitchen, quelling the Omega's apology for interrupting his evening with a simple excuse for his now-absent dinner guest, and busies himself with preparing the dessert while he waits for Will to explain the reason for his surprise visit.

"I kissed Alana Bloom," Will blurts out suddenly.

It is only further testament to the level of self-control Hannibal possesses that the plate he is holding does not break in his hand, that Will still stands there unfazed save for the anxiety he brought with him and is not thrown down onto the countertop with Hannibal's teeth at his throat in a possessive, claiming bite, that Hannibal is not already in his car now on his way to Alana Bloom's house with a scalpel in hand.

"And why did you do that?" he asks, raising his eyebrows and relaxing the tense set of his jaw before it can go noticed.

"I've wanted to kiss her since I met her," Will admits. "She's very kissable."

"Mm."

Will tells him everything that happened, not sparing himself the embarrassment of what he sees as his latest failing. Hannibal personally believes the failing lies with Alana Bloom for denying her own attraction to Will and succeeding only in giving the man one more thing to feel hopeless and inadequate about, but her rebuff is also the only reason Hannibal is willing to set aside his initial urge to eviscerate her slowly for daring to touch his Omega, so he lets it slide.

He supposes that in the long run, this can really only help his cause, but it is difficult to take that tack at the moment when his Alpha instincts are screaming at him to rip away every shred of Will's clothing and *show* him exactly who he belongs to, to claim and control and punish for daring to believe he has enough mastery over his own destiny to make that decision for himself.

He pours the sauce and adds garnish with extra flourish, aware that he is showing off somewhat in demonstration of his better suitability as a mate. He is also painfully aware that Will doesn't notice it, his usual amusement at the otherwise observant profiler's inability to see Hannibal's motives and intentions, ever hidden in plain sight, now tempered by the realization that Hannibal's potential as a mate doesn't even *register* to Will yet.

Will stops talking finally and takes his first bite of the dish set out in front of him. The naked appreciation on his face is enough to stroke Hannibal's ego but does nothing to soothe the agitated beast within.

"Will, may I ask a personal question?"

Will smiles wryly around the fork in his mouth. He sets it down on his plate and chews thoughtfully. "Well, you are my psychiatrist," he says finally after swallowing. "Aren't 'personal questions' part of the job description, or did that change when I wasn't looking?"

He could remind Will once again that their relationship is not officially that of a doctor and patient, but he suspects Will is perfectly aware of this and is merely deflecting out of habit. He maintains a carefully neutral tone and expression as he asks, "What do you believe is the reason for your avoidance of any potential romantic involvement with an Alpha, to the point where you would actively seek a member of your own gender or possibly even a Beta instead?"

Will's lips part in shock, his shoulders immediately tensing once more. *"Okay…*so when you said the question was *personal,* what you actually meant by that was *incredibly fucking invasive."* He takes a long, angry swallow of the wine set out next to his plate to keep himself from saying anything else, half-tempted to rise out of his seat and storm out.

Hannibal takes a step back from the countertop, his hands hanging unobtrusively at his sides and his head bowed demurely. "I apologize, dear Will. It was never my intention to offend. I had no idea you would find the question so upsetting," he lies.

Will's outrage drains out of him as quickly as it comes, leaving his posture sagging and exhausted. Seeing the other man so submissive and looking genuinely contrite about the question, Will can't help but feel ashamed of how strongly he had reacted to it, however inappropriate it was. He sighs and runs a tired hand through his curls. "It's…fine. You just caught me off-guard, is all. Please come back and sit?" He phrases this last as a question, suddenly feeling the wrongness of telling an Alpha what to do in his own home, even in a polite way, as inappropriate in its own right.

Hannibal brings his own plate and glass around to the other side of the counter and seats himself on the barstool next to Will. Will glances over at him without turning his head, taking in the man's companionable and repentant silence, and feels like he is the one in the wrong. Here he is biting the man's head off, *cursing* at him in his own kitchen, after having already intruded on his evening's plans and accepted his gracious hospitality without question—like he simply *expects* it at this point. Will swallows, his throat dry, and is unable to bring himself to finish his own food. He thinks it would be better for him to just leave, but doing so now would be unbearably rude, especially in light of what just happened.

Is his stupid pride or indignation worth alienating the last human being on earth who seems to actually give a damn about him? *Of course not,* he thinks, closing his eyes against another soft sigh. Especially not when part of the question's sting had come from it not being entirely off the mark.

He takes another sip of wine to steel himself and says, “You’re not wrong. I do tend to sort of…avoid Alphas a bit.” *A bit?* His consciousness snorts internally.

Hannibal says nothing in reply. He merely takes a bite of his own dessert and waits patiently and respectfully for Will to continue.

“It’s not that I don’t find them attractive,” Will says. He can easily see the appeal of all three genders—how could he not, given his empathy? And of course his biology would never allow him to be completely indifferent around Alphas in any case, particularly if he happened to be nearing his heat—though that luckily hasn’t been an issue for quite a while because of the strength of his current suppressant prescription.

“I guess I just don’t see the *point,”* Will says. “Alphas are…complicated. Frustratingly so, with their need to always be in control of everything and show each other up, and all the ridiculous *peacocking* they like to do and…oh…” He cuts himself off, suddenly *excruciatingly* aware of what he’s saying and who he’s saying it to.

Hannibal still has not said anything, but it’s like with the change in Alana’s face when he’d told her about the sounds in his chimney. He can see it there, just for a second, in the slightly thinning line of Hannibal’s mouth and the minute downward tilt of his head, that he’s hurt the man. Will’s heart sinks into his stomach and he wishes his body would do the same, that the ground under his feet would rise up and swallow him whole.

“Doctor Lect—*Hannibal,”* he says, spinning around in his seat, one hand braced on the countertop and the other on his right knee, in order to better face the man. “I’m sorry. That was completely out of line and awful to say and I didn’t…I-I don’t mean to imply that *you*…”

He stops mid-sentence at the feel of a hand coming to rest gently atop his own on the countertop. He raises his eyes from where they had been, firmly affixed on the man’s shirt collar, until they meet Hannibal’s own. The maroon-brown eyes are surprisingly warm and kind, making Will want to sink into the earth and bury his face even more, but he forces himself not to look away.

“It seems we have both done equal damage to each other with our words this evening,” says Hannibal, without a trace of reproach or resentment. Will does look down at that, shaking his head.

“You didn’t mean to be insulting—”

“And neither did you,” Hannibal interrupts. “It’s quite alright, Will. You were merely speaking honestly. There is no fault in that.” He rests his free hand atop Will’s right, fingers just grazing his knee for a moment before he curls them to wrap around Will’s own. The Omega glances down at their clasped hands, then back up to meet Hannibal’s gaze again. The Alpha smiles, pleased with this sign of restored good faith.

Will looks and sees nothing but sincerity behind that smile. He returns a weak one of his own and nods, hoping the man will understand because he doesn’t trust himself to speak anymore for now.

Hannibal understands. He nods once as well, smile widening and lighting up his eyes, now more maroon than brown. He pulls his hands away. “Finish eating, Will,” he instructs before turning back to his own plate.

Will obeys automatically, relieved to know that he hasn’t ruined two friendships in a single night. He should have known Hannibal would be as diplomatic and understanding in a disagreement as he is in anything else. He really is unlike any other Alpha Will has ever met.

Chapter End Notes

Will's actually too young to have ever seen *Lost in Space,* but his dad would definitely have remembered the show. There are so many fics out there that portray him as either neglectful or downright abusive, I thought we could all use the nice change and let Will actually have good, nostalgic memories of his father for once. :)

I think I may take a bit too much spiteful, wicked enjoyment out of forcing Hannibal to stay in Will's friendzone this long, but I can't be the only one who thinks he kinda deserves it for everything he's putting Will through, right? Think he'll get impatient and come murder me if I don't let him have his way with Will already? o_0

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this took so long to update--after that finale, I figured everyone would want a few days of fluff and fix-it fics...and this chapter definitely ain't it. Angst up ahead, my dears.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I can certainly see now why you would have no interest in *me,"* Tobias Budge says after entering the office and calmly greeting them, earning a rather strange look from Franklyn as he realizes his friend is addressing Doctor Lecter rather than himself.

Lecter stands immutable and silent somewhere in the Beta's periphery, giving no reply.

"Not your typical boring specimen, is he?" Budge continues. "Though I couldn't help but notice, as I was *cutting him open,"* here the psychiatrist narrows his eyes slightly and his nostrils flare, practically a flinch for him. Budge all but leers. "There was something a bit… unusual…about the scent of his blood? Suppressants obviously, but there was something almost *off* about them. Whatever have you been up to, dear Doctor?"

It all happens very quickly after that. He hears Franklyn try to placate his murderous wayward friend, like a gnat buzzing beside his ear, and disposes of the pest immediately. His response to Budge's irritated protest is something cool, clipped, and utterly irrelevant as the two of them tense for a fight. He would be appalled later at how much his instincts seem to take over in this moment, overriding his manners and his sense of restraint, making the next few minutes pass in a bloody blur instead of the controlled acts of violence he normally displays. His usual artistry does not matter in this moment so much as the need to *destroy* this Alpha who dared bring harm to his precious Omega.

The tension thrumming inside him does not abate with the Alpha's death or the arrival of Baltimore's finest. He appears the textbook model of a mildly shell-shocked victim after a horrific trauma; the fact that he needn't try all that hard to give this appearance does not sit well with him.

He worries slightly that his true self may be showing through the cracks when he hisses at a particularly persistent Beta EMT to cease his ministrations and allow him to attend his own wounds, and the man scurries halfway across the room in his hurry to obey. However, this can easily be explained by the way his Alpha pheromones unfurl dangerously and authoritatively as he gives the command, and that in itself is not an uncommon response from an Alpha who has just won a particularly grueling battle for dominance against another Alpha. For all that man is a civilized beast, he is still ultimately a product of his genetics, after all.

He wishes he could legitimately cast them all out of his office and leave himself in search of Will, but that immediately ceases to be a concern when Jack Crawford walks into the room… followed closely by Will Graham, alive and uninjured save for a plain white bandage wrap around his hand. The feeling that swells in his chest at the sight is at once both terrifying and exquisite.

Hannibal's scent reaches Will before he sees him, a potent combination of sweat, adrenaline, and pheromones. The relief that floods Will at the knowledge that the man is alive is almost overwhelming at first. Despite Jack's assurances on the way there that Hannibal was fine, Will had still felt terror sink into his stomach at the sight of the black body bags outside. He'd felt marginally better seeing that his friend was in neither of them. One held the corpse of Tobias Budge, the other a portly Beta Will had seen in the waiting room once before when he'd showed up early to an appointment—an incident he still remembered only because of the uncomfortable gawking that had made him want to cringe in his seat, particularly after the man's awestruck remark that he had never seen a male Omega up close before.

Will drifts over to Hannibal's side, all other musings forgotten as he notices the stab wound on the Alpha's leg.

"I was worried you were dead," says Hannibal, voice oddly husky.

Will spares him a reassuring smile. "Do you need help with that?" he asks, his own voice unusually soft and soothing as he nods at the man's leg. It seems to calm Hannibal a bit more, erasing some of the lingering tension he can still read in the man's posture, so Will doesn't bother trying to modulate his voice back to its normal pitch.

"It's not so terrible as it looks. I'm quite alright, Will."

Will wants to insist and just barely stops himself, merely biting his lip and nodding. Hannibal used to be a surgeon; he surely knows how to assess his own injuries better than Will does. It's just difficult when the scent of Alpha blood kicks his own overprotective instincts into high gear, making him want to nurture and comfort and try to help however he can. This is exactly why most Omegas generally choose fields such as medicine or social work over law enforcement. The benefits of this are twofold—the Omegas are happy to work in a career where they can help others, and the traumatized victims or patients (of all genders, but *especially* Alphas) are more likely to feel soothed and safe when in an Omega's calming presence.

Will pursued his own career out of a similar desire to help people—he simply chose a path less traveled by those of his gender in order to do it. Normally Will has no problem keeping a lid on this side of himself at a crime scene, but this is *Hannibal,* not some perp or yet another random victim. He leans back against the desk, arms crossed, hoping that in some small way his quiet presence will somehow be enough as Hannibal endures Jack's probing questions.

It does seem to help some, the man slowly relaxing little by little as Jack talks, but it's clear that he's still agitated and would like nothing more than for the other Alpha to finish up and be on his way. Jack finally takes the hint after a couple of minutes and excuses himself to talk to one of the local officers outside, leaving the two of them practically alone for the moment as all but a few of the officers swarming the place finally trickle out of the room as well.

“He hurt you,” says Hannibal, still with an edge of rawness and vulnerability to his voice that Will has not heard before.

“What, this?” he says, uncrossing his arms to show Hannibal his bandaged hand. “It’s fine. Hardly more than a scratch.” He nearly startles at how quickly Hannibal reaches out to grasp it in both of his hands, pulling it toward himself as if to take a closer look. His fingers are tight around Will’s, his thumbs exerting a pressure on the palm of Will’s hand that almost makes him wince.

“He spoke of you as though you were dead,” Hannibal says, and Will frowns guiltily. Before he can formulate a response, however, the man lowers his face to Will’s exposed inner wrist and inhales deeply. *He’s scenting me,* Will realizes belatedly, reassuring himself of the life and good health flowing through Will’s veins the way a worried parent or mate might do.

Will tries to mask how deeply unsettled that thought makes him by continuing their conversation as though nothing strange is happening. “I feel like I’ve dragged you into my world,” he says, throat sticking as he swallows.

“I got here on my own,” Hannibal replies, gaze lifting to meet his own. “But I appreciate the company,” and *that,* that Will can’t ignore, not as maroon eyes meet his own stormy grey-blues, practically *blazing. Oh,* he thinks.

Uh-oh.

The part of his brain that is *all Omega* practically purrs at the attention from an attractive thoroughbred Alpha, the man all but making a *declaration* through his eyes alone, but the other, *actually rational* part of his brain is trying to come up with a gentle rebuff that isn’t him running halfway across the room screaming, *Oh no, no no no, not you Hannibal, no, you’re my friend, you’re not supposed to look at me like that, no no no, stop it, you stop that right now!*

How the hell had he missed this?

“Doctor Lecter,”Will says uneasily, straightening as he attempts to pull his hand away. Hannibal’s fingers tighten convulsively around it, causing Will to actually flinch in pain this time.

Danger, Will Graham, his mind whispers to him once again. *Danger.* His father’s voice is not teasing now.

Then Hannibal blinks, seemingly coming back to himself, and lets go of his hand immediately. He looks down and pinches the bridge of his nose, the image of a man instantly contrite and perfectly embarrassed by his own behavior. “I apologize, Will,” he says, tone measured and even once more. “I am very tired after everything that has happened, and it appears tiredness makes me terribly impolite. Forgive me.”

Will bites his lip in sympathy and nods once. “I’ll take you home,” he says quietly. If his father were here now, he would have slapped Will upside the head for his trouble. *‘Boy, you don’t go anywhere alone with no unmated Alpha, especially one that’s still running high on*

his hormones after coming out the winner in a good fight.' The thought actually makes him feel *better* about it as he realizes how absurd it would be for him to be scared of his *best friend,* regardless of whatever the man's apparent feelings for him are. He also recognizes that they're going to have to talk about this now, and he'd rather not do so in front of half of the Baltimore PD, or worse, *Jack.* It'll be awkward enough as it is without an audience.

The drive there is mostly silent and gives Will plenty of time to think. Despite what others might expect, given his single status, Will is all too familiar with the usual signs of an Alpha's attraction to him. When he was younger and on cheaper generic suppressants, it had been much worse than it is now—not a single day passed at the New Orleans precinct where he hadn't been subjected to catcalls, lewd remarks, and open leers from some of the men being booked, or worse, some of his own *colleagues.* Yet even now, when he's treated with more respect out on the field and the people he works with are far more professional, it's almost inevitable that at some point he'll be forced to endure yet another deluded Alpha who believes *he* is the one who will somehow woo and reform Will of his 'wanton' unOmegan ways and make a good little housewife of him. Those men tend to run rather quickly once they learn how sharp Will's tongue is and how pointed his insights of their own motivations can be. He's been lucky of late only to deal with Alphas who are already mated like Jack, or those who harbor more disdain than genuine intrigue for him like Freddie Lounds.

Pulling into the driveway, he muses to himself that this is why Hannibal's attachment comes as such a surprise to him. Looking back now, even just to *last night,* he can't help but feel like an idiot for not noticing what was right in front of him, but at the time he'd simply thought himself fortunate to have finally made a friend who truly understood him and carried no expectations that he be anything other than exactly who he was, and who just *arbitrarily* happened to be an unmated Alpha as well. A tiny part of him can't help but resent Hannibal just a little for taking that away from him.

He bites his lip guiltily at the thought as Hannibal starts a pot of tea on the stove and asks Will to wait there while he goes upstairs to clean up and change. None of this is Hannibal's fault. It's obvious from his demeanor that he is embarrassed about his crush and hadn't wanted Will to know about it. Probably he'd hoped to quietly ignore it until it went away on its own without Will being any the wiser. One badly timed moment of eye contact and overcharged hormones had ruined all that.

Will sits and waits at the exact same countertop as last night. It feels like ages ago now that he was here, pouring his heart out to his friend about the woman who rejected him, and he laughs weakly to think that here they will sit to have the same conversation again in reverse. He wonders if it had been difficult for the man to listen to Will pining away about Alana and winces. *So much for not fucking up two friendships after all.*

He understands how Alana must have felt. Not that he hadn't empathized with her already last night, but actually *finding* himself in the same position now makes it feel that much worse. He silently applauds her strength for being able to walk away from that moment with dignity and grace, and thinks if he could just borrow a drop of that maybe he won't come out of this feeling like the biggest asshole in history.

And *oh god,* he thinks as he hears deliberate footsteps coming down the stairs, could the timing on this be any worse? Hannibal almost *died* today, and here he is about to…about to…

The whistle from the tea kettle comes almost as a relief to him. He bolts out of his seat to turn off the stove just as Hannibal walks in, dressed down in tan slacks and a casual red sweater. The Alpha smiles at him graciously before moving around him in the kitchen, setting things out on a tea service tray and gesturing for Will to follow him as he makes his way out to the den.

Hannibal has been musing on his own actions and the consequences of them as he dressed upstairs. He had never meant to tip his hand like that—an unfortunate consequence of his own pheromones running higher than normal and Will's ill-timed empathic epiphany. His only saving grace in this is that Will is unaware of how deep his obsession goes and what he is willing to do in order to achieve what he wants, likely believing it to be only a passing fancy Hannibal has labored to hide for the sake of their friendship. He can indulge that belief for now if that's what it will take to prevent Will from widening the gap between them further, much as it makes him want to grit his teeth in secret. He has not been viewed as an object of pity since his days as a mute orphan, and the thought of his own intended looking at him that way does not sit well with him in the least.

Alas, he has made this bed and now he must lie in it. He had known Will's reaction if he learned too soon of his affections would not be ideal, but that doesn't make it any easier to endure as the Omega conscientiously keeps his eyes lowered to the ground and sits at the opposite end of the sofa Hannibal directs him to, slightly further from the Alpha than he might have still been comfortable with otherwise. He conceals his irritation deftly, however, determined not to let his mask slip for even a moment in Will's presence again until there is no longer a need for it. If there is anything he has learned from this, it is that his Omega is getting far too good at reading him. It would not do for Will to look closer and see more of Hannibal's design than he is ready to face yet.

Hannibal also understands that even his own patience can only be stretched so thin before it snaps. As delightful as it has been to wind Will up and watch him go as he continues his erratic dosages of suppressants, he is tiring of this game and believes it is time to flush Will entirely of the toxins in his system. The result will be a sharp peak of the worst of his side effects, likely followed by an incredibly short-lived but intense heat as his body works to cleanse itself of the chemicals. It is impossible to predict exactly when this will happen, making it very difficult to time it just right, but he is confident he can make it work. He need only wait until the next time Will is away from home so he can swap the Omega's medication for all placebos instead.

In the meantime, he may as well turn these unfortunate circumstances to his own advantage as best he can. He quietly revels in the fact that at least he is now free to look and admire with far less restraint than before. "Will," he says as he pours the tea and passes the first cup to him, "I fear my presence has become a source of discomfort to you in the last hour or so, when it should have been otherwise. I regret that deeply."

Will flushes as beautifully as he could have hoped, a guilty automatic reaction as though he feels somehow to blame for it. "No, no," he's quick to reassure, "it's just…well…" He takes

a sip of his drink to give himself a moment as he considers his words. “Were you ever going to tell me?” he asks quietly.

“Certainly not,” Hannibal answers without hesitation. Will looks up at that. “You’ve made it clear since the beginning, though never in so many words before yesterday, how you felt about the idea of taking up with an Alpha as a partner,” he continues, phrasing it *just so* to elicit another lovely flush of guilt up Will’s neck. “I would have referred you a long time ago if I believed it to be an issue, unofficial though our sessions may be. I value your trust in me and your friendship far too much to risk jeopardizing it.”

Will swallows around the lump in his throat and says, “You know it’s not…it’s not *you*...”

“I do know,” says Hannibal. “You’re used to encountering Alphas who wish to use you, to mold you and manipulate you to their own ends. Even when faced with someone who desires you exactly as you are, who does not wish to change you or make unrealistic demands, that prejudice is ingrained at this point so deeply that it can be difficult to overcome.”

Will makes a protesting noise in the back of his throat at that, a cross between a scoff and a sputter—guilty, flustered, and a bit annoyed honestly as he struggles for words to defend himself with. “I wouldn’t call it a…it’s not a problem I have with *Alphas* so much as it is the whole concept of Alpha-Omega pair bonds in general,” he says. “Not that there’s anything wrong with them, I just…I’ve been told all my life that it’s something I’m supposed to want more than anything, and it’s like the more I hear it, the less I want anything to do with it.” He shakes his head, sighing. “My mother left my dad for an Alpha she worked with. Have I ever mentioned that before?”

“No,” Hannibal says. “But I’ve guessed as much on my own during our previous conversations.”

Will smiles unhappily. “I *hated* her for such a long time. She left a good man, just up and abandoned her entire family for this *fantasy life,”* he says, fanning his hands out for emphasis, accent thickening as he talks faster. “Y’know, just one of those *stupid Omegas* who threw away what she had ’cause she thought a few ugly teeth marks in her neck were all she needed to find *true love* and *happiness.”* He laughs bitterly. “As if love or happiness could ever be so simple or clearly defined.”

“It is unfortunately a rather common myth that pervades our modern culture,” Hannibal agrees. “I find myself often counseling mated Alphas and Omegas alike who are dissatisfied in their relationships because they expect it to be like the bonds they read about in great works of literature or see on film. They are surprised to learn that a claiming bite is not some magical talisman linking one to one’s soulmate forever and on. It is exactly as the name implies, an evolutionary impulse passed down by our ancestors to mark each other in order to denote ownership, nothing more and nothing less.”

“Exactly,” Will says, stimulated by the more intellectual turn of the conversation and forgetting for a moment how the topic came up in the first place…until he notices the way Hannibal’s eyes have been lingering on his neck as he speaks, the Alpha swallowing convulsively and averting his gaze as he catches himself looking.

Will blushes again and looks away as well. “I’m sorry. I…I should go,” he says, rising awkwardly out of his seat. “Could we, um, skip our next session? Just for this week,” he adds hastily. “I just…I think we should put a few extra days between now and…then. So it’s not so fresh.” *And awkward.*

“I understand,” says Hannibal, head tilted downward demurely. “I’ll see you out.” He winces visibly as he moves to stand, however, and Will stops him with a hand on his shoulder.

“Shit, I actually forgot you were hurt,” Will says. “Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

Hannibal shakes his head, eyes downcast, jaw clenched in a carefully telegraphed blend of pain and vulnerability.

If he is to be pitied anyway, he may as well take full advantage of the opportunity in front of him whilst he can.

“Are you sure?” Will asks gently.

“Perhaps,” Hannibal says, allowing a note of uncertainty to waver his voice slightly, “if it is not too much to ask, could I implore you to stay just a few minutes longer?” he asks, gripping the hand still on his shoulder tightly with his own. Will appears clearly discomfited both by the request and by the contact. “I find your presence quite soothing after a long and distressing afternoon,” he finishes, a subtle reminder both of what he went through today and of the times previous that Hannibal has been a source of solace to Will in his own distress.

Will’s eyes widen guiltily at the implication. “Of course,” he says, sinking back down onto the sofa next to him.

Well. *Nothing ventured, nothing gained.* Hannibal boldly wraps his arms around Will’s torso, pulling the Omega closer in a loose, platonic hug. He suppresses the triumphant smirk that threatens to break free as Will stiffens, then drapes his arms carefully around Hannibal’s shoulders, pulling the Alpha closer automatically despite his own obvious discomfort with the implied intimacy. Hannibal breathes him in deeply at the pulse point of his neck, knowing he will be excused the indulgence under the circumstances, as Will swallows and visibly tenses at the gesture, saying nothing.

For all his protests that he has little in common with other members of his gender, Will is so marvelously malleable when under the influence of his own nurturing instincts to comfort, protect, and appease. His mate will make such a wonderful mother.

One day. Soon.

Chapter End Notes

> Only Hannibal could take his own rejection and spin it into a Will-shaming party. "Oh, you're not into me that way? Well clearly, that means something's wrong with *you."* :/

Plus, dub-con hugging! Yay?

How do you guys like my interpretation of 'typical' Omegan characteristics? Obviously it's an oversimplification (such things always are), but Alphas get to be 'ambitious,' 'driven,' and 'born leaders,' so why shouldn't Omegas get some good traits too that for once don't include 'submissive' and 'wanton little sex vixens during their heats?' xD

Also, not gonna lie, I *love* the standard 'claiming bite' trope of "I bite you, so now you're mine forever" that I see in most fics, but it just doesn't work for my Omegaverse, y'know? I think it would take away from this story if we stripped Will of his autonomy that way, plus what would be the point in this long game of Hannibal's if that was all he had to do to cement a bond between them? So in my interpretation, a pair bond works far more like love in real life, in that it comes gradually over time and has no clearly defined "start point." One day you wake up and you realize you can't imagine yourself without this other person anymore, because it would be like cutting off your own arm. So, yay for slow burn! ^_^

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A few days after the incident at Lecter's office, Will goes to see Abigail.

After spending years of his life in self-imposed solitude, you'd think he would be used to having no one but his dogs to confide in most of the time, but apparently all the time he's spent around Hannibal and Alana lately has spoiled him. He needs someone to talk to who can respond to him in more than just yips and barks.

It's a selfish reason to go perhaps, but he doesn't think Abigail will mind his company too much. They have been slowly getting more comfortable and less awkward around each other over time. He just hopes to god that Alana isn't there.

He sighs with some relief when they lead him to her room and he sees Abigail sitting by the window alone.

"Hey," she says as he walks in, eyebrows pulled together in mild confusion.

"Hey Abigail," he says back.

"Is Doctor Bloom or Doctor Lecter with you?" she asks, craning her neck to look behind him as though she expects one of them to walk through the door.

"No," he answers, shaking his head. "It's just me today."

"Oh." She turns her head to look back out the window. Will stands there and watches her watch nothing outside and thinks, *So much for this not being awkward.*

He sucks in a small breath, knows he should say something more but has no words to pull from, and doesn't want to intrude upon her chosen silence more than he already has. So instead he closes his mouth, comes to stand next to the window beside her, and stares out at nothing with her for awhile.

"I wish I wasn't an Omega," she says after a few minutes of this, still looking away.

Will turns to face her, pulled out of the quiet reverie he'd fallen into watching the sunlight play with the shadows over the trees. "Why do you say that?" he asks, though he thinks he knows why.

She shrugs, a nonchalant adolescent gesture that conveys both much and little at the same time. "I don't know. It just sucks." Will snorts and thinks about how familiar the words sound.

"It's like, people look at you differently, once you present," she says. "Kids at school. Teachers." She looks down at her hands in her lap and doesn't say what they're both thinking.

“I bet it was pretty hard for you too, huh?” she asks instead. “With school and stuff I mean.”

He nods rapidly. “It was…very different. After,” he says. “Not all of it was bad.” Though a lot of it was. Gym class in particular was a special brand of humiliation for him. Most of the schools he’d gone to were too small and poor to have separate locker rooms for male Omegas —they didn’t see a need for it anyway since they didn’t usually get someone like Will in their towns, more used to the stereotype of male Omegas as thoroughbred children coming from wealthy pedigreed families. So the coaches would always either make him go first or wait until after the other boys were finished to shower and change alone. As a teenager, it had felt like he was always getting singled out in little ways that just kept adding up until he felt more alone than ever.

“I used to get bullied and teased pretty mercilessly,” he admits. “Until I presented that is.” They’d been living near Greensville at the time. He still remembers the next morning at school after his first little heat. The blatant ogling and stares from kids who used to ignore him unless they were in the mood to call him names or harass him. Maybe other people would have seen it as an improvement, but Will would have given anything to go back to blending into the background the way he had before. Instead he’d had to endure more harassment of a different kind and grit his teeth when teachers excused the other boys’ behavior, saying, *‘Alphas will be Alphas. They can’t help it, honey, it means they like you.’*

“There was this one boy,” he continues. “This Alpha in the year ahead of me named Robbie Anderson. He was one of the worst of them, always calling me a freak, trying to shove me in the hallway, that sort of thing. After I presented, he tried to pass all that off as flirting.” Will rolls his eyes at the memory and Abigail makes a sympathetic gagging noise that he can’t help but smile at.

“I think he was actually surprised that I wasn’t more receptive to his advances after that.” Anderson had been one of those small-town rich assholes who thought he was entitled to anything he wanted because his family had money. “He tried to corner me in the hall once and tell me I was gonna be his Omega whether I liked it or not, that he was gonna get his parents to go to my house to pay a bridal fee to my dad and take me away.”

“Oh my god,”says Abigail, horrified. “Is that actually still…a *thing* in the South?”

“Not in most places,” Will reassures. “And definitely not legally.” That didn’t stop a lot of families out in the sticks from still following the tradition while local sheriffs and city officials turned a blind eye, but he doesn’t tell her as much.

“What did you *say* when he told you that?”

“I didn’t say anything. I just punched him in the throat.”

Abigail’s laughter is sudden and ringing, filling up the room as she stares wide-eyed and claps one hand over her mouth, clearly startled by her own reaction. She’s still laughing even from behind her hand and quickly gives up trying to hide it, looking genuine and truly her age for the first time since he’s met her.

Will joins her, unable to stop himself even if he wanted to, and the two of them stand there for a few minutes, giggling like loons until they can hardly breathe.

"What…" She stops for a second, still grinning and trying to catch her breath. "What happened after that?"

"Oddly enough, he lost interest." Abigail snickers some more. "And I got suspended for a couple of weeks for assaulting a fellow student," he says, shrugging.

"Bet your dad wasn't happy about that."

"No, he was pretty understanding actually." Ned Graham had never gone for the idea that a "good" Omega should be a silent and obedient one. He had taught his son to defend himself and raised him to stand up for what he believed in, and that desire to see Will come into his own as a man had never wavered even after Will presented as a gender different from his own.

The only change that really occurred was that Ned became, if it was even possible, somehow more fiercely overprotective of his only child than ever before. Will almost felt like he was doing the kid a favor at the time when he punched him. He was positive that if Anderson *did* show up with his parents at their doorstep as threatened, intent on brokering a deal over Will with his dad, the entire family would have found themselves facing down the barrel of his father's shotgun as he asked them to kindly get the fuck off his front porch instead.

There is a strange look on Abigail's face now, and Will decides to break his own personal rule for once and push his glasses further up, the better to see into her eyes without the frames obstructing his view.

He sees *connection* there. *You understand me,* her eyes say, assigning it not to his empathy disorder as people usually do, but to shared experiences. *Strange, lonely little Omega. Only child. Meant the world to dad more than anything else ever could.* He hadn't really thought about it before, had been so caught up in the connection he couldn't shake from the father that he hadn't realized how much *more* he could actually relate to the daughter.

True, his own father's love had been much healthier and hadn't warped the man into a killer, but the potential was always there, as much as it existed in any human being really. He had seen it flicker there a couple of times—it was there in the protective arm slung around Will's shoulders and the wary look in his father's eyes at the movies once, when he caught a twenty-something-year-old Alpha who'd just sold them popcorn blatantly checking his son out as they walked away. And it was there when he arrived to pick Will up after the fight, in the quiet undertone to Robbie's father that Will definitely wasn't supposed to overhear, *"Tell your boy if he so much as looks at my kid again or even* thinks *too loudly, I'll make sure he's* intimately acquainted *with the knowledge of what I can do with just a few fish hooks."* His dad was certainly fearless when it came to doing whatever he deemed necessary to protect Will. Fearless and *rash.*

Will never even went back to that school. Mr. Anderson didn't take Will's attack on his son or his father's comment very well and pulled a few strings with his connections around town

to get them evicted by their landlord. They were scrambling to move into a cramped little apartment in another county altogether by the time Will's suspension was up.

Will worked very, very hard to keep his head down, stay out of trouble, and avoid letting his father find out about any other boys that tried to hassle him after that. He decides not to mention any of this to Abigail, and lets his "funny" anecdote end with the way his father had winked and tussled his hair after they got in the truck and told Will he was proud of him for "kicking that Alpha's ass," also leaving out what had been said to Robbie's father earlier.

It doesn't seem to matter how much he leaves unsaid. Abigail still looks at him shrewdly and says, "Your dad didn't like other Alphas very much either, did he?" *Just like mine.*

"My dad was a Beta actually," Will corrects softly. "But you're right. He didn't…*trust* Alphas easily." Will has never been sure how much of that was bitterness over the one that stole his wife, and how much of it was simply a natural consequence of being an overly worried single parent with an Omegan child. Will would be the first to admit, however, that it likely colored his own opinion of most Alphas he's ever met far more than it probably should have.

"Yeah," Abigail says just as quietly, agreeing, clearly lost in her own memories as well. "Thank you."

"For what?" he asks.

"For…" She stops herself, looks up at him and bites her lip. "I don't know. Coming and talking to me, I guess? Doctor Bloom and I never really talk about this kind of…*Omega stuff.* So thanks."

They smile at each other a little sadly, and there's something both awkward and oddly comfortable about it. What a pair they make.

"So," she says, drawing the long syllable out. "Wanna stop talking about this stuff and just go play checkers or something?"

Will huffs out a laugh. "Sure," he says. Abigail smiles a little more brightly and leads him out to the rec room. The rest of the visit passes more easily, and for one bright moment in his life, Will Graham feels strangely content and perfectly understood.

*

"I'd like us to talk more about this Omega you brought up during our last session, this *Will Graham.* I'm curious how things are progressing between the two of you."

Hannibal inclines his head graciously. It is interesting—he would have guessed Doctor Du Maurier would be more interested in studying the parallels between the attempt on his life and her own attack from years ago. It would seem this has been on her mind since his last visit, however. "Things are progressing well enough. There was a minor setback, for a moment, but I believe I have mostly corrected it now." He has not told her what precisely his plans for Will are, but she is an intelligent woman. It would not be difficult for her to guess.

Especially since, pared down to its basest form, it is essentially the same old story told since before time began, since the first Alpha in human history met the first Omega and staked his claim.

“What kind of setback?” she asks placidly, back straight, hands poised carefully in her lap, perfectly still.

“A very small one,” he assures with a smile. “Hardly worth mentioning.”

“Yet you chose to mention it all the same,” she says. “Which seems to suggest that it is far more significant to you than you would otherwise claim.” Hannibal smiles faintly again. This is why he admires Bedelia so. The Beta is quick to pick up on things, and takes great care with her words without being too circumspect. “He surprises you,” she says.

“I find him difficult to predict at times. I will admit, it is rather refreshing to meet someone so,” he says after a well-timed pause, “…unique.”

“Hannibal,” Bedelia begins, and he can tell by the smallest increase to her volume and pitch that she is now getting to the heart of what she wants to say. “What will you do when he does something you do not expect?”

“I am not sure I understand the question. Do you mean simply in general?”

“I mean in this little game you’re playing,” she says. “What will you do when he reacts in a way you did not intend?”

“The same as I did before,” he answers. “I will counteract it to the best of my abilities, and set us back on the correct course.”

Bedelia smiles for the first time since they began on this topic. “I imagine if he is as intriguing and unpredictable as you say, he may not be so easy to dissuade from the course of his own choosing.”

Hannibal inclines his head again thoughtfully, considering. Easy, no, it will most certainly not be easy to persuade Will that the life Hannibal wants for them is the life he should want too, but that will only make it all the more rewarding once he finally succeeds.

“You have a tendency to place high expectations upon those whom you value most,” she continues. “Almost precariously so, it would seem.”

Hannibal says nothing in response to that. There is nothing to reply. She is, of course, absolutely correct. He will only accept the best in those he holds in high regard.

“What you are building here,” she says cautiously, “it cannot stand on its own if you refuse to allow anyone else their own agency. You will never have a truly equal partnership if you do not allow yourself to relinquish some of the control.”

Hannibal hums thoughtfully. “I will keep that in mind,” he says. He has no intention of relinquishing control, but the idea of he and Will being on true equal footing is a lovely thing to consider. So long as he can be sure the empath’s choices would align closely with his own.

He accepts the glass of wine she offers at the end of their session, and in a moment of whimsy he decides to offer a brief toast. “To family,” he says.

Bedelia raises her eyebrows and toasts with him. He sees within her gaze curiosity, intrigue, and above all, *fear.*

He raises his glass with a smile, and sips.

Chapter End Notes

Some a/b/o stories tend to portray Will as an Omega nobody wanted for most of his life, and just for the heck of it I thought, 'Why not give Will *the exact opposite problem* instead, especially while growing up?' And somehow that idea morphed further and turned into, 'Let's give lots of background nobody ever sees on his teen years and his relationship with his dad and stuff like that,' and ten chapters later this story somehow turned into this huge, strange, sprawling feminist critique/exploration of gender roles and expectations and duality and sexism in modern society and *I swear to God I have no idea how that happened. This was not my intention when I first began this story, I swear.* It just sort of happened. I'm sorry. Unless you like that about it? Then I'm not sorry, I'm the exact opposite of that. :D

Ned's a good name for Will's dad, right? I like Ned. It was almost gonna be Ted because *ha ha, teddy grahams, lol!* but Ted is a rather common nickname for my name, and I decided kind-of-but-not-really naming a character after myself would be weird. #WeirdWriterlyProblems

Lastly, I finally got a tumblr about a month or so ago, so feel free to check it out if you're bored. :D

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> I had to think up a synonym for *beanie* this chapter, because one simply does not use a word when narrating from Hannibal's POV that one cannot imagine being said in Hannibal's voice without giggling. Go on, try it: *"Beanie."*
>
> Can't do it, can you? ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Much as he certainly prefers Will to be lively, present, and vividly in the moment, he must admit that there is something almost ethereally beautiful about his Will with a smooth blank expression and glazed empty eyes. He reminds Hannibal of a porcelain doll. It's rather enchanting really.

He barely responds to Hannibal's questions, speaking only in plain monotones when he does answer at all. The only time the psychiatrist sees life stirring behind Will's eyes are when they slide away from him, gazing in awe and fear at some untold vision behind Hannibal, or off into a darkened corner of the room.

Disassociation in this extreme is a good sign for Hannibal's purposes. Will's mind is breaking from reality now just to keep up with all the misfiring signals being sent to his brain—first from the erratic dosages of his daily suppressant intake, now from utter withdrawal from them altogether. Hannibal wouldn't be surprised if he's even had a mild seizure or two at this point in a moment of lost time or in his sleep. It won't be long now before his body forces itself into a heat simply to regain equilibrium.

Hannibal isn't one for the much too oft-praised concept of Omegan docility, but he will admit that it is oddly appealing to see Will naturally inclined to take direction from the Alpha in his current state. He does not shy away from the hand guiding him on the small of his back. It brings…interesting possibilities to mind.

No. Perish the thought altogether. He will not jeopardize everything he has worked so ardently for on a whim.

With a delicate sigh, he reaches a hand up and brushes his thumb over the scruff of Will's cheek. Will doesn't even flinch. His darling boy is far too much of a temptation like this. He will have to wake him up. He cannot be left alone with him like this.

"Will," he says, "I am going to attempt a form of mild hypnotherapy on you to bring you out of this state. Listen to the sound of my voice. In a moment, I will tell you to *wake up,* and when I do you will return to your usual state of consciousness with no memory of this

conversation. Nod if you understand me." Will blinks slowly, and after a few long seconds he inclines his head once in acknowledgement.

"Good," says Hannibal with a proud smile, lowering his hand from Will's face before taking a step back. "Now put on your jacket and hat again."

Will's movements are languid and unintentionally sensual as he attempts to put his arms back through the holes of his jacket sleeves with minor difficulty. Hannibal's throat tightens a bit at the sight, and after a soft grunt of discontent he steps forward again to help Will be done with it faster. He must get this Omega out of his office and back into the waiting room before he does something he will regret.

"There," he says as he tugs Will's knitted cap back down over his ears. With an arm draped loosely across his back, fingers crooked gently into the bend of Will's elbow, he leads the Omega back out into the middle of the waiting room.

He allows himself one small indulgence before he steps back—just a moment to lean in and brush the tip of his nose over the thin delicate skin at the pulse point of Will's neck, breathing in and scenting him deeply like he had two weeks before, in his home with Will's arms wrapped comfortingly around him.

The soft unconscious noise his boy makes in the back of his throat and the goosebumps that rise on his skin nearly undo him. He suppresses a growl and steps away from Will quickly to calm himself.

He goes to the doorway of his office and stands there with a hand on the door, posed in such a way that it would appear he is just now stepping outside. "On my word now, Will," he says firmly.

"One, two, three…*WAKE UP."*

*

One moment he's gripping the knife, looking into Nicholas Boyle's eyes as he buries it into the other man's gut. In the next, it's Abigail's eyes he's looking into, and he lets out a startled gasp as the knife digs into his belly instead. She looks stricken by what she's done. He wants to cry.

He allows it of himself just this once, in the safety of his car afterwards where no one can hear or see, just one long, distraught Omegan wail before he buries his face in his hands. He can't handle this anymore, not in the wake of everything else that's been happening to him—the nightmares, the visions, losing time. He wishes he could lay the blame at whatever is going wrong in his damaged psyche, call it confusion, a hallucination, *whatever,* but the truth is he has never seen Abigail Hobbs more clearly than this.

The worst is that he can still feel what she felt—her fear, her exhilaration, her distress, all of it. There's an echo of Boyle underneath it too—confusion, rage, terror. And yet above all that, it's his own emotions thrown into the mix that he can't escape. Above all that, he feels

betrayed. He'd allowed himself to get close to Abigail, let her know him and see him, connected with her in a way he hadn't dared to hope for with anyone else.

And she had done *this.*

How? How was it even possible? How could she have killed Nick Boyle and secreted his body away from the scene with police swarming all over the property? How had she…?

Slowly he lifts his head and pulls his hands away from his face. *Of course.*

He feels strangely calm as the pieces fall into place in front of him. He turns the ignition and drives out immediately, away from Jack, away from the FBI, away from maybe even himself in this moment.

He pulls up a little while later in the driveway to Hannibal's office. It feels like his arrival was surprisingly quick. Maybe he lost time again on the way here. He doesn't care.

"Abigail Hobbs killed Nick Boyle," he tells Hannibal, apropos of nothing, as if he is not utterly destroyed inside by this simple statement of fact.

"Yes," says Hannibal with equal candor. "I know."

Will finds himself nodding, scrunching his face almost comically as he says, "Tell me why you know?"

"I helped her dispose of the body."

Will is unsure how to explain it to himself later, how he goes from angry, hurt, and accusing of the man in front of him to resigned, *still hurt,* but now also somehow complicit in this entire nightmare.

He thinks it may have happened somewhere around the point when Hannibal stated, "We are her fathers now." At the time he'd thrown Hannibal a deeply unamused look that said, *Really? That's how you want to word this, after what happened between us before?* Yet he had conceded the point anyway, hadn't he, without even saying a word.

Like it or not, he *does* feel responsible for Abigail. Does it tear him up inside knowing now what she did? Yes. Doubly so, knowing that she hadn't trusted him enough to confide in him about it. But…he can't bear the thought of her going away for this. He *won't* let that happen. This doesn't have to be her life. She still has a chance.

And maybe, if he can believe that, he can also believe in there still being a chance for himself as well.

Chapter End Notes

Things that happened in season one are about to happen a bit "out of order" in the upcoming chapters as this thing progresses. The reasons for this are thus--Will does not suffer from encephalitis (even if he does show similar symptoms) so it's my personal headcanon that his mind would start making some connections more quickly than what happened on the show. He's not going to figure out *everything* yet...just one thing for now. But that one thing, coupled with the fact that Will is nearly on the cusp of his heat now, means that Hannibal is going to have to move a few items up in his schedule in order to catch Will at the right moment. So be prepared, for the times, *~they are a-changing.~*

In other words, just as I promised, this story's about to take a walk straight out of Canonland and into straight-up AU territory. ~~*Finally.*~~

Chapter 12

He feels restless. Anxious. All of his nervous tics and neuroses bubbling up to the surface at once. Chewing his nails. Tapping his foot against the carpet. Twitching in his seat. Laced throughout it all a sense of urgency—*What day is it? Where did all the time go?*

He relives Nicholas Boyle's death over and over again in a dream. The feel of the knife handle in his hand. The cold metal plunge of the blade into his gut. Abigail's sad, wide eyes.

He tries to forget about it in the daytime. He doesn't need to see this again. He knows. He knows it was self-defense. He knows Abigail was afraid. He knows the terror, the confusion, the feeling of loss. *He knows.*

Yet still he fixates. His thoughts keep replaying the scene whether he wants them to or not, and he can't escape the niggling feeling that there's a reason behind it, something important that he's missing. So he stops trying to fight it—he closes his eyes and tries not to fidget in his chair, forces himself to live it one last time and really *look.*

Abigail's eyes. The knife in his gut. The shock, the pain, the fear, *Why? Why? What did I do?*

"Will, is something wrong? You've been quiet for some time."

Will's eyes spring open, and just like that he's back in his psychiatrist's office. Hannibal is seated across from him, looking at him with mild concern.

It takes Will a moment to find his words. "Nicholas Boyle wasn't the copycat," he says softly, almost a whisper, as if worried that saying it louder will wake the boy's ghost.

Hannibal looks taken aback. His shoulders tense as he straightens in his seat. "What makes you say that, Will?"

"It just doesn't add up with the rest. If Nicholas Boyle were the Copycat Killer, why didn't he struggle more? If he meant to hurt Abigail, he should have gotten at least some defensive wounds in. The Copycat Killer overpowered Cassie Boyle and *eviscerated* her, with no mercy," Will says, voice steadily gaining in volume and confidence as he speaks. God, he'd been so caught up in the fact that this was *Abigail's* doing for the last several days that he'd ignored his own instincts about the rest. "Nick Boyle didn't do that," he says with assured certainty.

Hannibal looks away from him with a slight frown. "Will," he says carefully, "are you fully aware of what you are suggesting?"

Will lets out a shaky breath and nods. "Abigail killed an innocent man," he says.

There's a pause in which Hannibal seems about to say something else, but appears uncertain he even wants to give voice to the words. "You don't think she knew?" he asks finally, his voice soft.

“No! *No,”* Will quickly assures him, vehemently shaking his head. “No, she was scared. She just saw her best friend dead, heard us talking about it. We *all* thought it was him at that point,” Will reminds him.

“It begs the question then, what was Nicholas Boyle doing at the Hobbs residence, if he was not there to kill Abigail?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he knew something. Maybe he just wanted to talk.” Will runs his hands over his face, clearly agitated. “Son of a bitch is still out there,” he mutters.

“Then he may never be caught,” Hannibal says. “It is as you said, he is unlikely to kill that way again.”

“Oh, I don’t know. He did it twice. That’s once more than I expected,” says Will dryly. His brows furrow as he thinks. “Maybe…”

“Yes?” Hannibal prompts.

“I think…I should take Abigail back to Minnesota.”

Hannibal blinks. Whatever he had expected Will to say, this was not it. “What would doing that accomplish?” he asks.

“I don’t know. I just have to do *something.* Draw him out somehow maybe,” says Will, shrugging. He stands and begins to pace around the room. “Maybe going back to where it all happened will get me in the right headspace. And it would help to have a chance to talk to Abigail with no else around for once. Take her somewhere familiar, try to get her to open up to me.”

“You think she knows who it is?” Hannibal rises from his own chair, mildly torn between wanting to hover near Will and keeping a respectful distance.

“I think she knows *something* she isn’t telling me,” Will says. “Bringing her back to where Marissa died…”

“Could be a highly traumatizing experience for her,” Hannibal finishes for him.

Will bites his lip guiltily. “Could also be the push she needs to talk about it,” he says. “She’s tough. I think she can handle it. More importantly, I think she’ll want to, for her friend’s sake.” Will suddenly looks rather determined about it now.

Hannibal thinks back on Bedelia’s warning with a chill in his veins. “Will, I’m not sure this is wise,” he tries.

“Speaking as my psychiatrist now or as my friend?” says Will with a humorless smile. “I appreciate the advice, Doctor Lecter, but I think I’ve got this.”

“At least take some time to consider. Don’t rush into the decision lightly.”

“Why not? The sooner we get this over with the better.” He’s not sure why he feels so belligerent about what is, after all, a reasonable suggestion. Maybe it’s just that he resents being told what to do by an Alpha, even if that Alpha is Hannibal. Maybe it has something to do with the itch building beneath his skin, the sense of urgency, that there is *no time,* that he needs to make some headway in this case *now* while he’s still cognizant and fully aware because later…later will be *too late.*

“I’ll talk to you afterwards,” he promises, and abruptly walks out—rather *rudely*—before Hannibal can say a word to stop him.

Hannibal is left to stare after him with an uncharacteristic feeling of helplessness. It had all been going so well. How had so many threads of the tapestry he has been weaving for months unraveled so quickly before his eyes?

Difficult to predict. Those had been his own words to describe Will only weeks prior, one of the Omega’s traits which he admired most. The fact that Will could come to the conclusion he had about Boyle so quickly while his mind should be in *shambles* right now—it gives Hannibal a distinct feeling of unease to imagine what he could learn on this little impromptu trip with Abigail Hobbs.

Correcting this situation would require damage control of the most extreme degree. He is disappointed in himself for not having a better plan laid out for this possible contingency.

He regrets, knowing what he will have to do next, but nothing can be allowed to get in the way of his designs for Will Graham—not even Will himself, and certainly not Abigail Hobbs.

*

“I thought I got away from him.”

“I don’t think either of us have gotten away from your father,” Will admits.

She looks up at him then. “You know my mom was a Beta?” she asks, changing the subject in a way Will doesn’t quite understand yet, so he only nods.

She gives him a little smile that is utterly heartbreaking to look at. “I used to feel sorry for her,” she admits. “For both of them. I thought how sad it was, that no one except me really saw how much they loved each other. You know the kind of stuff people say behind the backs of any Beta who’s not with one of their own, that it’s only a matter of time if they’re with an Alpha or an Omega before that person will just leave them and form a pair bond with someone else.”

Will looks down at his own hands uncomfortably. “It’s not always true,” he says, and hopes she can’t hear the strain in his own voice as he says it.

“No,” she agrees. “It’s not, but people always think it. They’re animals like that.”

He looks back up at the anger he can hear in her tone. She doesn’t seem to notice the way he’s studying her. “Still, I felt bad for her, you know? Not that I ever worried my dad would

leave her, nothing like that, but just knowing that *I* had something to look forward to that she would never experience, no matter how in love with him she was. It's all you hear about growing up as an Omega, what an amazing thing the pair bond is supposed to be."

"I think that kind of talk tends to be a little over-exaggerated," Will says dryly. Abigail smirks before her face grows more serious again.

"One of the girls here," she says, gesturing with a tilt of her head to the room at large, though she doesn't look at anyone in particular, so it may be someone not present, "asked me if my dad and I were bonded. If that had something to do with why he killed all those girls."

Will doesn't know what to say. He already knows it's not true, that nothing in the way Garrett Jacob Hobbs treated his daughter or the girls he murdered in lieu of her had any sexual component. He also knows that Hobbs was a deeply disturbed man, an Alpha who may have felt a stirring of something shameful he never wanted to admit to himself from the constant presence of his Omegan teenage daughter, a feeling he tried to kill by killing proxies of her instead. He knows that Abigail already knows this as well as he does. She's no fool.

"I used to look forward to being pair-bonded to someone," she continues. "Now I'm *terrified* of it happening. I don't want it. People say Betas are the unlucky ones, but it's not true. They get to choose and *keep choosing.* They can always back out and move on if the relationship goes bad but *us,"* she says, gesturing between Will and herself, "we don't get that choice if we end up bonded to some Alpha. I mean, yeah, you could still break up or get a divorce, but you'd always be stuck with these *feelings* for someone you don't want to have anymore." Abigail shakes her head quickly and says, "I don't want that to happen to me."

Me neither, Will thinks, for either of them. He doesn't comment on how perfectly her words express his own thoughts, his own reluctance to connect with an Alpha on that level out of the same fear, that in spite of his ability to see into another's soul he would still choose someone unworthy. Worse still if he were drawn to someone *because* of that ability.

He doesn't know what he would become if that were ever to happen.

"This wasn't supposed to be my life," says Abigail. "It feels like my dad's still out there."

"In a way he is," says Will. His words are a far cry from the comfort she may have been looking for, but this is not a time for empty platitudes Will has never been good at anyway. As important as this discussion is, and he promises himself that he *will* address it with her again on a later date, this is not what he really came here for. He needs her back on track and focused on what he's asking of her now.

"You mean the copycat?" she asks, her eyes widening.

"I think I can catch him," he says, taking her hands in his, "but I'm gonna need your help."

She seems nervous about it, but maybe it's the thought of her father killing all of those girls in *her name* and the idea that someone could still be out there emulating what he did, leaving open a chapter of her life that she wants to see forever closed, for after a moment she finally squeezes his hands back and nods.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> An aside note--it bothers me on the show when Will and Abigail go back to the cabin that those bloodstained antlers are still there. Shouldn't they all have been confiscated as evidence? **sighs** Oh well, this show isn't always very logical about this kind of stuff, and in keeping with canon neither is this. Fair warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The closer they get to their destination, the worse Abigail's attitude seems to become. Will can't say he blames her, considering he's dragging her out to a place that is thoroughly tainted for her now. It's still unpleasant, however, and goes onto the list of things he wishes he didn't have to deal with at the moment, right alongside the pounding headache thrumming through his temples and the uncomfortable warmth growing beneath his skin, which he attributes to the sheer number of people sharing their closely confined space on the plane.

He notices the way she side-eyes him when he slams back another three aspirin down his dry throat, and he doesn't want to deal with that either. She doesn't say anything but she thinks *loudly,* and Will has to fight back another grimace and the irrational unfair urge to snap at her.

Only a few hours ago they were talking at the psychiatric hospital, and Will thinks she may already be regretting her decision to go along with him. That doesn't surprise him either.

They take a rental car out to the cabin, and that's another thing that would probably make people check off the tick box labeled 'Crazy' under his name—between this and the plane tickets, he's spending a lot of his own money on a field trip that could turn out to be a bust, money which he doesn't expect the bureau to compensate him for since he knows perfectly well Jack wouldn't approve of their little outing if he knew about it in the first place. Will is fine with this. He gets paid well enough for his teaching, and he's self-aware enough to realize that what he's spending here probably wouldn't have gone to much besides whiskey and dog kibble anyway.

The car ride is even more terse and silent than the one on the plane, anxiety creeping in on both of them as they near the place where Marissa's body was found. Will goes in and leads the way upstairs ahead of her, almost half-expecting some other monster to be waiting there —the copycat, the stag, maybe even Hobbs himself—and not feeling all that relieved when all he finds are bloodstained antlers instead.

"What are we supposed to be doing here?" Abigail asks skeptically.

"Something here could be the clue that reveals the connection between your father and the Copycat Killer," Will says. "This is where he made it *personal,* used your father's antler

room…"

"And targeted my friend," Abigail finishes. She stares at the stained antlers across the room, where Marissa's body had hung limply and dripped blood onto the floorboards, and frowns, considering. Her eyes flick back over to Will. "Do you hunt?" she asks suddenly.

"I'm more of a fisherman," Will says honestly.

"It's the same thing really, isn't it?" she says. "One you stalk, and the other you lure."

There's a roar of rushing silence in Will's mind at these words, a terrible sickening *click* of things falling into place. He turns back to her slowly and asks, "Do you hunt or do you fish, Abigail?"

"My dad taught me to hunt," she says, stepping back warily.

"That's not what I'm asking," he says. He wants to shout or sob or rage, but all he really manages is a deceptively soft whisper. "Did you stalk those girls or did you lure them, Abigail?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Don't lie to me!" he yells, and Abigail takes another step back, eyes wide and frightened. "You were the bait," he says, laughing humorlessly because *fuck,* how could he have been so *blind?* "Jack was right about you. He *knew."*

"Wait, you think *I* did this?" she yells back. "You think I killed *Marissa?"*

"I don't know what I think anymore."

"Well maybe *you* did it," she says. "You're obviously not well. There's something wrong with you." She leans forward a bit unconsciously when he steps closer, her eyebrows pulling together as she notices something…oddly familiar, but confusing. "You even smell kind of off," she says.

"Don't try to make this about me," he says, advancing closer to her, and she backs away quickly, seeming to remember her situation.

"Forget it, *you're crazy!"* she screams at him, face contorted angrily.

"Sir, we've landed," the attendant says kindly. Will startles.

He's sitting on an empty plane. "I'm sorry. Where are we?"

"Dulles International, Virginia," the woman answers, now looking at him with mild concern. "Sir, are you alright? Maybe you should be…home? Or there's an Omega clinic nearby," she tries to suggest delicately as she leans in to be more eye-level with him, wrinkling her nose slightly.

“Was there a young woman with me?” he asks, barely registering the rest of what she says. *A clinic*—is it obvious how sick he feels then? He feels worse than he did on the flight to Minnesota, almost feverish and shivering now, and worse, *scared.*

“No sir, you were traveling alone. Look sweetie, do you have an Alpha I could call for you or someone to come pick you up?” the Beta says as though she’s speaking with a lost child, her hand reaching up almost as if to pet Will’s curls soothingly.

“I have to go,” he says, standing abruptly and brushing past her before she can touch him or say anything more.

His immediate thought is to call Jack, before he remembers belatedly that he left his cell phone at home on purpose, mostly as an excuse for why he wouldn’t answer if anyone tried to call him while he was in Minnesota, and partly to keep Jack from tracking him there with it if he were desperate enough to find out their location that way. He’ll have to go into Quantico now. Abigail is missing and he has no idea what happened. He lost time again.

But the pull of *home* is strong as well, nearly overriding his other senses. He *needs* home, needs his dogs, needs to be away from strange people, strange *men,* needs to get out of these itchy clothes, needs his blankets, needs to nest, needs, needs, *needs*…

He brakes sharply at the first stop light, palms sweaty on the wheel and shaking. *“You’ve got to be kidding me,”* he whispers to himself, but there’s no more mistaking it once he finally pays attention to what his body is trying to tell him. Somehow, *inexplicably,* buried under the headaches and the shaking and the nausea of whatever illness grips him now, he can feel another response stirring in his blood, a different sort of *aching* within. He’s going into heat.

“Fuck,” he swears loudly, hiding his face in his hands. A car horn blares behind him, and he looks up to see that the light has changed.

After another second’s hesitation he turns right, towards home instead of Quantico. He can’t go in like this, no matter how concerned he is for Abigail and where she might be right now. He’ll just have to ride it out and hope it’s a short one before he goes near any Alphas. He can call Jack when it’s over. For now, everything else will have to wait.

*

He has his back to her when she walks in, but he can hear her soft footsteps and smell her girlish floral shampoo. She’s alone. This will make it easier, if no less heartwrenching to bear.

“He knows that I helped my dad,” she tells him, seemingly unsurprised to find him here. “Did you tell him?” Her voice is accusing and slightly hurt.

“I did not, Abigail,” he says, turning to face her. “Though it seems I did not need to.” It was inevitable that Will would figure it out on his own eventually, just as it is inevitable that he will one day learn Hannibal’s secrets as well, but the doctor had hoped he would be able to control the circumstances and the timing of it better. If only.

He is genuinely fond of the girl and had hoped for more for her than this. She was useful for getting Will to slowly open up more to the idea of family, and Hannibal had thought perhaps he might reward her by honoring her with a place at their table, perhaps as an older sibling or aunt-like figure to their future children.

“Where is Will?” he asks her.

“I left him at the cabin,” she says. “He was…acting weird. I think he might be sick or something.”

Hannibal frowns at that. “You left him alone, knowing he was unwell?” Cruel, selfish girl.

“It wasn’t like that!” she adds hastily. “I-I didn’t feel safe around him anymore.”

“What else happened at the cabin, Abigail?” he asks, taking a step closer. “What else did you talk about, besides how you helped your father lure those poor girls to their deaths?”

Abigail takes an unconscious step back, her eyes coming alight in dawning comprehension. He would be lying not to admit, there is a curious vicious thrill in his heart that will always revel in that shift in another’s demeanor, the moment they realize they are the rabbit caught in the wolf’s jaws. Abigail’s fear has some fierceness to it as well, a rabbit with teeth.

“I didn’t tell him who really called the house that morning, if that’s what you’re asking,” she says. It is clearly meant as both a reassurance and a threat. Clever, but not clever enough. If anything, it is only more obvious to Hannibal now that she is a danger to have around and not to be trusted. He admires her, yes, but she will never be as important as Will and the family they will create. She cannot be allowed to jeopardize that. It simply will not do.

“Will said whoever called the house must be a serial killer,” she says, either uncaring any longer about the risk to her own life or simply putting up a brave front about it. Her courage is certainly commendable. “How many people have you killed, Doctor Lecter?”

He rests his hand gently across her cheek. “Far more than your father ever killed,” he answers.

“And are you going to kill me now?” she asks, allowing one tear to fall. It is both beautifully sincere and utterly manipulative at once. An unfortunate waste of potential, but Abigail Hobbs made her choices, and the sins of the father never really do wash away. He could possibly terrify and intimidate her into submission, into going along with exactly what he says and falling in line with his own plans, but doing so would kill that spark in her that makes her so marvelous and interesting. It would be more of a mercy to end her suffering now and be done with it.

He pulls her closer to him in a tight embrace. “I am so sorry I could not protect you in this life, Abigail,” he confesses in her ear.

After a long moment of cataloguing her scent and the way the light catches in her hair to memory, he slides the knife out of his outer coat pocket.

*

The drive to Will's house afterward is excruciatingly slow. It is already quite late. The stars are out and the moon shines brightly overhead.

He does not phone ahead.

Abigail had mentioned that Will was acting strangely. With any luck, he may be losing time again, and if not Hannibal is assured enough of his own ability to induce such an episode almost on demand.

There are two ways this evening can go, one which is ideal and preferred, and another which is far less so but sadly more likely. Hannibal is realistic in his expectations. It is highly probable that he will have to put his plans for their future on hold and stall for time somewhat while he sets this mess to rights. In order to do that, he will need Will out of the way for awhile, somewhere rigid and controlled where he can make no more unpredictable moves. Prison is ideally suited for this, and the only reason he even contemplates the option of framing Will for Abigail's murder, loath as he is to do it and force an indeterminate separation between them.

The only way this option can be realistically avoided is if an opportunity presents itself to speed his original plans along and push his agenda forward *tonight.* Not a moment of time can be wasted if this is to be the case.

It is with this thought in mind that he leaves his equipment and the cooler in the trunk of his car for now as he walks up to the house, though there is little hope in his heart at this point that they will prove unnecessary.

He hears the dogs barking and howling inside as he ascends the steps, urgently trying to alert their master of the intruder on their property. There is light inside and Will's car is in the driveway, but there is no one to greet him at the door, no voices or any noticeable sign of activity inside besides that of the dogs. Interesting. It is likely as Hannibal predicted then; Will is too far gone in a dissociative state to take cognizant notice of his surroundings.

He turns the front door handle and finds it unlocked. Seven dogs rush forward to greet him, all of them instantly submissive and respectfully wary of touching him or coming too near as soon as they recognize his scent.

But it is another scent in the air that catches Hannibal's attention as he steps further into the room, one that brings an unbidden smile to his lips and makes his blood sing in a mixture of relief and joy.

Chapter End Notes

dun dun DUNNNN

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> This is it, you guys, the moment we've all been ~~dreading~~ ~~eagerly anticipating~~ waiting for. A very important possible trigger warning though: This chapter is what the other big bad Archive Warning is for. **This is the Non-Con chapter.**
>
> A note on why I consider this non-con rather than dub-con: Will is most definitely, absolutely in no frame of mind whatsoever to give consent, even dubiously. In fact, one might even interpret some of his actions this chapter as being the opposite of that. If you feel you would be more comfortable skipping this chapter, by all means please do so. I promise Ch 15 will still make sense even if you do skip and don't get all the details of what happens here, and if anything is unclear you can always comment or send me an ask if you want me to answer privately. ^_^
>
> Further minor trigger warnings for hallucinations and a reference to possible unintentional self-harm.

The walls are misshapen, dark, fading. Everything is buzzing, bending, warping, melting. There are sharp things, flashes of white in the shadows. Antlers? Something is dripping. Blood. Blood is always the answer.

The air makes strange noises. Rough grating barks—*"Tss,"* he answers automatically, then puts his hands over his ears because that usually stops it but not now, not this time—and distorted howls, claws scraping at wood. A cacophony.

The cacophony ends. There is…something else here. A shadow figure with tall spiraling horns. It smells like a predator. He ignores it. Pay it no mind. It's not really here. Nothing is here.

"Will?" Hannibal says cautiously as he comes nearer, and the profiler takes a tiny step back, determinedly looking away to the floor when a moment ago he had been staring, wide-eyed and awestruck. He is clad in nothing more than boxers and a T-shirt already soaked through with sweat. There are thin scratches on his arms. Hannibal frowns. He can only imagine what sort of things Will may have done before his arrival to put those marks on himself.

The scent of his clothes have the stale tang of a detox which ended at least an hour ago, perhaps longer, leaving him healthy and chemical-free at last—the only evidence he was ever unwell at all will be these clothes, the scratches on his arms, and the loss of time he will undoubtedly experience in the morning when he wakes fully from this last lingering hallucination.

It is the scent Will is giving off *now,* however, that draws Hannibal closer. Overpowering the odor of old sweat and dogs is the clean, pure sweetness of *heat,* likely Will's first since he went on his current suppressants however many years ago.

Hannibal stalks closer, his eyes darkening, barely aware of the low growl slowly rumbling in his own chest.

That sparks a reaction. Will stiffens and takes another deliberate step backwards, bristling as his lips pull away from his teeth in an answering snarl.

It is easily the most alluring sight Hannibal has ever laid eyes upon. *This* is what an Omega should be, not the simpering creature Alphas are told they should want and Omegas are taught they should be, bearing its neck and rubbing up against the first Alpha that catches its eye. This hearkens to more primitive days when Omegas were known to be just as fierce and violent as their Alpha counterparts, never submitting until they were *made to* by Alphas strong enough and worthy enough to mate with them. An Alpha that beat out his rivals over the rights to an Omega still did not win his mate until he also subdued the Omega in question.

Hannibal is impressed and admiring of the fact that even in his current dissociative state, in the throes of his heat no less, Will is still capable of being interesting, setting Hannibal a challenge to overcome rather than giving in to him eagerly. If he were not a man in love already, he would be utterly lost to this boy now.

Hannibal drifts ever closer and reaches a hand out as if to touch.

Will darts out of reach, a low angry noise in the back of his throat, and bolts for the open front door.

Logically, Hannibal should be irritated, mildly concerned even, as Will runs out barefoot into the snow, but the instinctive animal within him delights in the elaborate ritual and unexpected opportunity to give chase to his prey.

Hannibal goes after him. Will is fast, already half way across the open field outside his house, but Hannibal is faster. He catches up with Will near the edge of the woods and tackles him to the ground, grinning viciously as the Omega struggles to get out of his grasp, clawing and kicking on the way down.

Hannibal pins Will beneath him, winding the fingers of his left hand tightly into Will's curls, forcing him to tilt his head back. Will is still struggling against him, trying to fight or flee, right up to the moment Hannibal leans forward and sinks his teeth into the juncture where Will's neck meets his shoulder.

The effect is instantaneous. The fight leaves Will immediately, his writhing limbs now falling limply to his sides. Hannibal laps languidly at the few droplets of blood that escape from his bite mark, victorious when the Omega trembles at the sensation and lies docilely beneath him.

Carefully he wraps Will's arms around his own shoulders and his legs around his waist. The Omega takes the hint and clings tightly to him like a limpet as he stands, Hannibal easily

lifting the added weight in his arms and carrying his shivering prize out of the cold back into the warmth of the house.

The dogs crowd them as he steps inside, curious and confused about what's going on with their master. Hannibal whistles at them sharply and they all disperse, obedient to the dominant Alpha taking temporary charge of their pack. He kicks the door shut behind him and deposits Will onto the bed, stripping them both of their wet clothing as quickly as possible, both of them already achingly hard from their previous exertions outside.

He takes a moment to compose himself and savor the delicious view of pale smooth skin laid bare for him at last. Will reaches up for him impatiently, a single line of clear slick dribbling down his thighs as he parts them and tilts his hips upward invitingly.

Hannibal groans at the sight and wastes no further time, grabbing onto Will's hips to hold him steady as he lines himself up and thrusts in for the first time.

Will tosses his head back and grunts, gripping onto Hannibal's shoulders tightly and digging his nails into his back as he drags him closer, wrapping his legs around Hannibal's hips again and crossing his ankles over them as though he fears the Alpha will pull away and take his thick, hard cock with him.

Hannibal complies with his wishes, lowering himself to cover Will's body with his own and forcing Will's hips to tilt up further and take more of his cock, pressing in all the way to the hilt. Will keens, trying to move but unable to do anything in his current position.

The Alpha sets a brutal, punishing pace, pounding quickly into his mate with deep powerful thrusts, holding him in place tightly enough to leave bruises. There will be time enough for romance and slow, leisurely love-making later. Right now he needs to breed this Omega deeply, fill him with his seed as quickly and as many times as he possibly can in the mere span of hours he has before Will's short-lived heat ends.

His knot begins to swell after only a few minutes. Will makes a discontented noise in his throat and squirms, uncomfortable with the unfamiliar feeling. Hannibal soothes him by petting his hair and laying kisses all over his face and neck, lingering over his bite and laving it with extra attention. The Omega whimpers and scrapes his fingernails harder over Hannibal's back, desperate for more friction.

Hannibal reaches down between them and strokes his mate once, *twice,* and suddenly Will is coming, spurting into Hannibal's hand with a rough groan. Hannibal follows immediately after, his lover's tight walls clenching around him and greedily milking his cock of every last drop.

Hannibal allows himself to collapse over Will and cage him within his arms, leaning in for a deep languid kiss. For the moment they are both calm and at rest, not yet ablaze with need to begin the process all over again. The Omega purrs contentedly in his arms, nuzzling behind his ear. Hannibal orgasms into his lover three more times while they are still tied together before his knot softens enough to be pulled free.

Later, he has Will again, this time in a more traditional position on his knees, ass presented in the air.

He misses getting to watch the expressions on his lover's face as he pushes into him, but it's worth it for the lovely view of Will's back as he arches, for the feel of him pressing back against Hannibal's hips with every thrust, for the moans he makes because of the deeper, rougher angle.

He lays them both on their sides after they climax together again, gentling his Omega to sleep with soft caresses and whispered words that he knows are meaningless to Will in this state. He can feel the fevered heat already starting to leave Will's body, slowly returning him to a state of normalcy—though perhaps with luck, not all will be the same with Will's body. Time will tell.

He comes twice more before slipping out again entirely. Will is deeply asleep by this point, his heat now over.

Much as he would like to stay wrapped securely around his mate for the rest of the night, there is still much that needs to be done. He rises from the bed without waking Will and puts on his own rumpled clothing, snatching up Will's ruined underthings as well to be disposed of later. Will has plenty to spare. He won't miss them.

Hannibal checks his watch. He has time to make a quick stop at Jack's house, then head home to shower and change, perhaps take care of a few other things as well, before he should return here.

Before he leaves, he goes to Will's workbench and selects a few pieces from Will's collection of finished lures. He had made his own "additions" to some of these during his visits here, subtle courting gifts in a manner of speaking, but feels now that it would be more prudent to store them in his own home for safekeeping should Will fall under suspicion for Abigail's death anyway. He suspects Will is unlikely to notice their absence either, given the chaos his mind has been forced to endure of late.

After his brief visit to Jack's residence, he goes home and immediately burns Will's shirt and boxers. Even a Beta with the dullest nose would be able to tell there was something wrong with the way they smelled, and he doesn't need Will thinking about it too deeply and going to a doctor to be tested for a mysterious illness only to find the real cause of his recent ailments.

Sometime later, after he has washed up and stored his equipment away, Hannibal decides on a creative whim to make something beautiful with his new collection of fishing lures.

He hums something light and joyful as he works. It takes more wire, metal, and the better part of an hour before he is completely satisfied with the design. Perhaps it is a bit premature and whimsical, but he feels more hopeful for his family's future than he has in weeks, and feels there is no harm in allowing that to be reflected in this impromptu art piece that no one else will be allowed to see.

He hangs it by a hook on the wall in his basement and stands back to admire it. A pity he is not more mechanically inclined, or he might add a wind-up motor of some kind to rotate it or

a small device to play music.

Although perhaps rather quaint in its charm, it appears strangely to belong and does not look out of place as one might expect, hanging over the butchering table next to his industrial freezer—a crib mobile of sharp gleaming hooks and feathers, woven with human hair and blood and bone.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> This chapter took awhile to write and it's quite a bit longer than my usual word count, even after I decided to cut off the last third of it and make that a chapter of its own. Which incidentally means I'm already about halfway through with writing Ch 16, so hopefully it'll be ready as well later this week. ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Mm, banana nut muffins," says Bella, sniffing the air as she walks into the kitchen. "You sure know how to spoil a girl."

"Me and Betty Crocker," says Jack, shaking the empty mix packet at her playfully before tossing it into the trash bin, "we know the surest way to our girl's heart is through her stomach."

Bella chuckles and kisses him on the cheek. "Well, while you're slaving away in here, why don't I go check the mail?"

"I don't think it's here yet. I'm pretty sure it's too early."

"I'll check anyway. I could use the exercise."

Jack glances up and looks his wife over as if to say, *Baby, you like fine just the way you are.*

"Oh hush, you," she says as though he's spoken aloud and walks out into the living room.

And it's true, even this early in the morning in nothing more than her nightgown and headwrap, she's still the most beautiful woman he's ever seen in his life. He's pretty sure he'll think that way even as the cancer starts to take a more visible toll on her body.

He closes his eyes for a moment and shakes his head, trying to dispel the last thought.

After what seems like too short an amount of time, he hears the front door shut again and she comes back to stand in the kitchen doorway.

"I thought you were going to get the mail," he says with a smile as he looks down at her empty hands. It drops away from his face, however, once he notices the expression on hers.

"I think…it may be best if you get it instead," she says. Her voice is even, her outward demeanor calm, but he can see in her eyes that she is visibly shaken.

"Bella…?"

“I’m going to get dressed upstairs,” she continues. “And then I think I need to lay down for a minute.” He follows her out of the kitchen and watches her climb up the stairs. About halfway up, she turns to him slightly and says, “Jack, you should hurry. Before the mailman comes.” With that, she turns and continues the rest of the way up, shutting the bedroom door softly behind her as she enters.

Jack goes outside and opens the mailbox.

He immediately fishes his cell phone out of his pocket and calls one of the first numbers he has on speed dial.

“Huh, wha…boss?”

“I know I just woke you up, Bev, but listen to me. I need you to call Jimmy and Zee. There’s a crime scene. I need all three of you over here right away.”

“Where is it?” she asks, sounding much more alert than before. The phrase ‘crime scene’ will do that to a lot of people.

Jack takes a deep breath to fortify himself. “My house,” he says, and hangs up.

*

Will wakes up feeling sore and not very well-rested at all. That in itself is not cause for alarm —he has gotten used to being unwell in some capacity or another pretty much since he started consulting for Jack, and hasn’t gotten a decent night’s sleep in too many nights since then to count. What does give him pause, however, is the fact that he’s naked under the covers.

He tries to recall whatever happened last night, but all that really comes to mind is a vague sense of unease and a dark hulking figure in the shadows, like something summoned out of one of his nightmares.

Actually there may be cause for alarm after all, he realizes, as he notices how much of the ache he feels is concentrated in his lower back. And his *thighs,* he realizes with dawning horror, his thighs are sticky with slick and…something more. He sits bolt upright so fast, it startles awake some of the dogs lying asleep in their beds.

Now that he is sitting up and fully aware, he notices two other things that are out of place. One is the clean pair of boxers and shirt folded neatly and laid out at the foot of the bed. Another is the handwritten note left on his bedside table. He realizes with both dread and a strange fluttering in his chest that he recognizes the handwriting. Gingerly he picks it up and reads,

Dearest Will,

I apologize for leaving without informing you first, but I did not wish to wake you and have

a few errands to attend to in Baltimore this morning that require my immediate attention.

I will return as soon as I am able and make it up to you with breakfast.

Yours,

H

Will lets the note fall into his lap and hides his face behind his hands. It could mean anything though, couldn't it? This doesn't have to be what it sure seems to look like. Right?

Sure, 'Dearest,' whatever you say.

Before he can lose his nerve or second-guess himself, Will picks up his phone and calls his… psychiatrist. *Christ.* Half of him prays the man doesn't answer.

"Will," he hears his own name uttered warmly after only the second ring. Of course he does.

"Did we have sex last night?" he asks bluntly. There is no sense in sugar-coating a conversation that will inevitably be awkward as hell and embarrassing for both of them anyway.

There is silence on the other end for a long moment, and then, *"You don't remember."* Hannibal's tone is carefully neutral, but Will thinks he can hear a faint note of something fragile underneath it that makes him bite his lip guiltily.

"No, I can't remember anything after coming home. I…I'm sorry."

"Do not blame yourself," Hannibal chastises. *"I should have realized you were dissociating at the time but I was…quite preoccupied with other thoughts."* Will swallows, throat dry at the implication. *"You do not remember calling me then and urging me to come over as quickly as possible?"*

"No," he answers, blushing fully now. Had he really called the Alpha and invited him over in the middle of his *heat?* He must have. It's not like him at all, given his track record with Alphas and total avoidance of them at all costs, *especially* during his heats, but he knows Hannibal wouldn't make up something like that. He can almost picture it now—how he must have undoubtedly thrown himself at the man as soon as he walked in. *Goddammit.* He sighs. "Did I say why?"

"No. I assumed by your tone that it was urgent, however." Another delicate pause. *"Of course, had I known you were in heat…"*

Will waves his hand in the air dismissively, forgetting for a moment that Hannibal can't see him. "You couldn't have known," he reassures. "I didn't even know until yesterday." On the way home from the airport, he remembers. His breath stills in his throat. "Abigail," he says in a half-whisper. "She didn't come back with me. That must be why I…called you."

"I see," says Hannibal. *"And you don't know where she is now?"* Will shakes his head. Before he can voice his answer, however, Hannibal continues. *"Will, I'm on my way back to your home now. I should be there in less than twenty minutes, in fact. We will discuss it further when I arrive."*

“Okay, I…yeah. Okay.”

“Will, everything will be fine,” Hannibal reassures, his tone more gentle. *“We will get to the heart of this matter together. I will see you soon.”* With that, he hangs up.

Will sets his phone down and sighs again. He should probably clean up in the short amount of time he has. He gets up, grabbing the clothes on his bed with one hand, and walks naked into the bathroom to shower. He notices small cuts and bruises here and there as he looks down at his body, and shivers even though the water is steaming hot.

His neck throbs a bit when he presses his fingers against it, and his eyes spring open again in silent alarm. He turns off the showerhead and steps out, quickly drying off and wiping down the fogged-up mirror with one hand so he can get a better look. There, in plain view for anyone to see, is a livid bite mark, purple and bruising under the dim yellow ceiling light.

His lips press tightly together in a thin unyielding line the longer he stares at it. He’s torn between anger—how dare Hannibal mark him this way, like a possessive dominating *mate,* how *dare* he—and guilt, because if it wasn’t obvious to him before how strongly Hannibal must feel about him, it certainly is now.

He knows it doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of things—a claiming bite, if not renewed constantly, will heal and fade eventually like any other wound. It was likely done in the heat of the moment, a visceral and instinctive reaction on Hannibal’s part, one that would have gotten an overwhelmingly positive response from Will in the grip of his own hormones at the time. Nevertheless, it will heal into a scar that will forever serve as a reminder of what happened, and a warning to anyone else with a romantic interest in Will that he is “already taken,” as sure of a sign to back off as a wedding ring might be, probably more so in most people’s minds.

While he won’t miss the unwanted offers or flirtations from interested Alphas, he resents the fact that it’s not his choice anymore, that some of his own agency has been taken out of the equation by something so small and meaningless and *permanent.* He resents knowing that it will be an obstacle in the way of any future relationship he might have, that he will now have to *explain* to anyone he may be interested in that he is not bonded to someone else and endure either disbelieving looks or pitying ones—as if he needed another label on his skin to scream out *“Damaged Goods!”*” to the Alana Blooms of the world.

Will huffs out a single, irritated breath and gets dressed quickly. What’s done is done, and there are more important things to be worrying about right now than his own vanity and nonexistent love life. He has time to think selfishly *after* they find out what happened with Abigail and track her down. He hopes to god she’s alright.

He comes back downstairs to find Hannibal standing in his living room, feeding what appears to be sausages and assorted bits of bacon to his dogs.

“Forgive me for allowing myself in,” he says. “I knocked but no one answered.”

“I was in the shower,” says Will.

“Yes, I see that,” says Hannibal with a faint smile, his eyes lingering over Will’s wet curls and clean exposed skin. Will fights off a blush, wishing he’d pulled on pants and a button-up before coming downstairs. He feels especially underdressed next to the Alpha in one of his usual immaculate suits and long overcoat.

“So…about Abigail,” Will begins awkwardly.

“Yes,” says Hannibal, his expression serious again. He lifts a bag in his hand that Will hadn’t noticed and asks, “Is it alright if we eat while we talk?”

“Sure, of course,” he says as he nods, pointing the way to the dining table. He follows Hannibal into the kitchen and grabs plates and utensils to use, absurdly grateful for the temporary distraction, while Hannibal takes out tupperware dishes and sets them out on the table as well.

“Protein scramble,” says Will when he sits, recognizing the fluffy eggs with bits of sausage mixed in being scooped onto his plate. He laughs. “Like our first breakfast together.”

“It is a bit like that one,” Hannibal agrees, “although with a slightly varied recipe which called for a few changes in the ingredients.” Hannibal’s smile is soft and genuine, but there is an edge of sadness to it as well. Will doesn’t pry. He supposes Hannibal is thinking about the happier expectations he had for how this shared meal would go while he was cooking it at home, and Will feels another pang of guilt. What the hell could he have been thinking, calling Hannibal during his heat, knowing full well how the other man felt about him, what it would mean to their relationship and how much it would complicate *everything* if they ended up sleeping together?

“Eat, Will,” says Hannibal. “Before your food grows cold.”

Will takes a bite and closes his eyes, barely restraining himself from making inappropriate noises around his fork as he eats. He hadn’t realized how *ravenous* he was until the food actually touched his tongue. This is the first time he’s eaten probably since yesterday morning, and he’s certainly expended a lot of energy since then.

“It’s amazing, as always,” he says as he practically scrapes his plate clean in almost no time at all.

Hannibal’s smile is much brighter now. If he thinks it uncouth of Will to have finished so quickly while he himself is still only about halfway through his plate, he says nothing about it. In fact, he offers Will more and empties the rest of the scramble remaining in the dish he brought from home onto Will’s plate.

“Are you sure?” Will asks even as he picks up his fork again. “God, you’re a lifesaver. Thank you, Hannibal.”

“It’s my pleasure,” says Hannibal sincerely. Will is too preoccupied with filling his empty stomach to notice the way Hannibal’s eyes gleam with self-satisfaction and pride, knowing that he has pleased *his Omega* so well and provided for him with the fruits of his own labors. He fully intends to do so more often, even if Will proves just as recalcitrant toward his

advances as ever. He will not allow Will to evade courtship forever, regardless of whatever Will thinks of what he must consider to be their "one-night stand."

"So," Hannibal says finally, "you took Abigail to Minnesota. When is the last time you remember seeing her?"

"At her father's cabin," Will says. "We argued, then…I woke up on the plane."

"What did the two of you argue about?"

Will looks up at him soberly and says, "She helped her father lure those girls."

Hannibal sets his fork down. He looks as though he is considered something. "Do you think she helped in killing them as well?"

"No," says Will. He shakes his head. "I don't know. I hope she…" Rather than finish his thought, Will places his elbows on the table and rests his head in his hands. "I don't know."

Hannibal allows Will to brood on that for a moment longer before he says, "It seems likely she fled then, once she realized you knew at least one of her secrets."

"You don't think she…?" Will trails off again, his voice muffled by his hands. He lowers them to his lap and looks up at Hannibal again. "I don't remember what happened after. I remember one of us was yelling at the other and then," he gestures with one of his hands, letting it float in front of him and drift out to the side, like a boat lost at sea, or a slate being wiped clean, *"nothing."* He swallows around a lump in his throat and lets his hand drop. "What if I did something to her while I was losing time?"

"You did not," says Hannibal assuredly.

Will chuckles mirthlessly. "How do you know?"

"I know you. Even in a dissociative state, you are still yourself. More or less."

"More or less."

"Will," Hannibal says, leaning forward. "I know you care a great deal about Abigail, even knowing the truth about her as you do now."

Will bites his lip. "Her father cared too."

"You are not Garrett Jacob Hobbs," Hannibal says sternly. "You are Will Graham, and the Will Graham I know would not hurt Abigail Hobbs. If you refuse to trust yourself, then at least put your trust in me."

Will smiles wryly at him. "Okay," he says. He takes another bite of his eggs. "That almost sounded like something Jack would say, you know."

"I am unsure whether or not I'm meant to feel insulted."

That startles a genuine laugh out of his Omega. Hannibal allows himself a small answering smile, victorious.

Of course it does not last. Will's house phone rings, and he excuses himself from the table to go answer it. Hannibal continues his breakfast and pretends he does not know exactly what the call will be about.

"Hi Bev, what's—slow down, you're..." He hears Will trail off, and then a soft, barely audible, *"What?"* Hannibal rises from his chair then and goes into the living room.

Will is sitting in one of the armchairs next to the fireplace, his free hand gripping onto the armrest for support. "Are you sure?" he asks. Whatever answer he receives on the other end makes him squeeze his eyes tightly shut. After a few more moments of tense silence, he says, "Yeah. I'll be there as soon as I can," and hangs up.

"Has something happened?"

Will looks up from where he was staring off blankly at the opposite wall. He says one word, "Abigail."

"She has been found then?"

Will opens his mouth to speak, but hesitates a moment before he says, "P-part of her." He leans forward with his elbows resting on his knees and drops his head into his hands again.

Hannibal does not need to fake the look of pain that crosses his features, even if he is already prepared for this announcement. He crosses the living room to stand before Will's chair, and when the other does not look up or even lift his face from his hands, he kneels before him, unmindful of the dust and dog hair that will surely cling to his trousers, and rests his hands gently atop Will's bared thighs. "This is not your doing, Will," he says firmly.

Will lowers his hands then to look at him. "I know that," he says, his voice steady and calm. He does know. Even if he might have believed himself capable of harming Abigail, he knows he wouldn't have left evidence of it at Jack Crawford's front door. He *couldn't* have even if he wanted to—he can account for every minute between the time the plane landed in Dulles and the time that he got home, and apparently he has a witness in front of him who can account for the time after that should it come up. "It's *his,"* says Will. "The copycat."

Hannibal says nothing in response to that. There is nothing to say. Will is, after all, technically correct.

"I should get dressed," says Will. "They need me at the lab."

"Would you allow me to accompany you?" Hannibal asks, brushing invisible dirt from his knees as he stands.

It is likely a sign of Will's vulnerability at the moment, that he doesn't even think to protest or mention the potential inappropriateness of Hannibal being there in any capacity during an official investigation, merely nodding as he awkwardly stands and makes his way to the

bedroom to change. Hannibal uses the time to clean up the remains of their breakfast and return his own items to the trunk of his car.

Hannibal offers to drive them when Will returns from the bedroom. Will shrugs, outwardly uncaring but secretly relieved he won't have to be behind the wheel. He doesn't entirely trust his own focus right now.

After he feeds the dogs and lets them outside for a few minutes, the pair of them get into Hannibal's Bentley and pull out of the driveway. Will does his best to think about nothing as he watches his house get smaller and smaller in the side passenger mirror until it disappears from view.

Chapter End Notes

I realize it may not be as clear as I originally hoped for in the context of the story itself, so for anyone who may have skipped Ch 14 and been unsure on this point, Will did *not* call Hannibal or invite him over, nor did he throw himself at the man as shamelessly as he assumes he would have during his heat. Hannibal Lecter is a filthy rotten liar, friends, that is all. :P

Chapter 16

As it turns out, Jack has no problem with the psychiatrist's presence. He barely acknowledges it beyond a gruff, simple greeting before getting started. It's Beverly who asks what he's doing there, and she merely raises her eyebrows when Hannibal explains that he was with Will when the Omega received her call.

When no one else is looking, she casts a glance over at Will that he knows he should be worried about, one that clearly says, *We're so talking about this later.* He can't really bring himself to care at the moment, although his fingers play unconsciously with the frayed edges of the scarf he hasn't removed yet, for fear that the high collared shirt he chose may not be quite enough to fully cover his neck where he needs it covered.

"It's the Ripper," says Zeller.

"It's *not* the Ripper," rejoins Price with a touch of exasperation. Clearly they've been having this argument since before Will and Hannibal arrived. "Not everything is the Ripper."

"I'm sorry, but who else would leave a piece of a dead girl pretty much gift-wrapped for Jack to find? I mean no offense, boss, but this guy's obviously trying to taunt you again."

"We don't know that she's dead yet," says Jack stoically.

"And to answer your question, try any nut job who read Lounds' article about Miriam Lass' arm being left at the observatory," says Beverly. "He's an attention seeker."

"Well, that much is obvious," says Price.

"It's a message. Whoever did this, they came onto my property, *my home,* and left Abigail Hobbs' ear in my mailbox for my wife to find."

"You guys are getting a protection detail, right?" asks Zeller. Jack grimaces at the question but nods.

"How is Bella?" asks Hannibal.

"She's shaken up," Jack answers. "But all in all, she's handling it pretty well."

"Perhaps she should come see me once things have settled down."

Jack nods again, more agreeably this time. "You're probably right. I'll mention it to her. Thank you, Doctor Lecter." He turns then to the Omega who hasn't spoken a word since his arrival. "Will, can I talk to you in my office?"

"Jack, if I may," says Hannibal, "I believe it would be best if I were present also."

Will clenches his teeth but says nothing against it. He's not sure which bothers him more, that the man would invite himself into a private meeting between Will and his boss like a

concerned psychiatrist—*or an overbearing mate*—or that Jack acquiesces to the request without hesitation. *Fucking Alphas.*

They leave the rest of the team to continue their analysis of what little evidence they have and go into Jack's office, with Hannibal shutting the door behind them as they enter and coming to stand beside Will.

"I think you know what this is about," Jack begins. Will stares resolutely at the man's chin. He can certainly guess what it's about, and part of him appreciates the consideration Jack is showing not to do this in front of the others, but that doesn't make it any easier to face the confrontation he knows is coming.

"This morning I called the hospital Abigail Hobbs was staying at," Jack continues. "And they tell me that *you* checked her out of their care without specifying when you would be returning her yesterday afternoon."

Will nods. "I did."

Jack takes a deep breath like he's doing his best to remain calm and patient in the face of overwhelming odds stacked against him. "And may I ask *why?"*

"I took her to Minnesota with me," Will admits. "I thought she could help me uncover the identity of the Copycat Killer."

Jack steps closer, looming uncomfortably near Will's personal space. Beside him, Hannibal straightens his back slightly. "We know the copycat's identity already," says Jack. "You told me before that it was Nicholas Boyle."

"I was wrong before," says Will. "I don't think it was him. It's someone else."

"Let me see if I have this straight. You change your mind about Nicholas Boyle. You take Abigail Hobbs out of the psychiatric hospital and decide to go on a little road trip to Minnesota, *without consulting me first,* on a hunch that *maybe* it'll give you a lead on the Copycat Killer. Did it?" Jack asks. "Because I'm curious how we got from there to *Abigail Hobbs' ear winding up in my mailbox,"* he says, raising his voice. Will flinches.

"Jack—" Hannibal begins to say warningly, but Will interrupts. "Are you accusing me, Jack?"

"I'm *asking* you, Will. What happened in Minnesota?"

Will has given a lot of thought to what he would say to Jack, how much he should reveal, and changed his mind about a hundred times already on the ride over and since. Now that the moment is here, he decides it's for the best if he sticks as close to the truth as possible, with one important difference. He only hopes Hannibal won't say anything about it.

"We went to her father's cabin," he says. "We argued—"

"You argued?" Jack repeats, interrupting. "What did you argue about?"

“I believe Will was just about to tell you that, Jack,” says Hannibal. Normally he would say nothing, allowing Jack to continue roughshod with his methods and utterly uncontested as the seemingly dominant Alpha in the room, but the man’s open rudeness is wearing thin in its amusement for him.

Will sighs and puts his hands up in an appeasing gesture to both of them, trying not to show just how irritated he is by all the Alpha posturing in the room. He doesn’t have the patience today to deal with Jack’s usual unwillingness to listen *or* the mistaken impression Hannibal seems to have that one night of bad choices gives him the responsibility—*or the right*—to jump to Will’s defense as though he were some *precious thing* in need of coddling.

“You were right,” he tells Jack before one of them can interrupt him again. “She was helping her father. She was the bait.”

“She told you that?”

“No, she denied it. She yelled at me, called me crazy, and then…she ran off.” He can feel the way Hannibal’s eyes linger on his face, but the Alpha says nothing to dispute Will’s claim.

“You want to run that by me again?” says Jack.

Will looks down at his shoes and fidgets. “I lost her in the woods,” he says. “I couldn’t find her. I didn’t have my phone to call anyone so—”

“So you let a suspected killer flee from your custody *and you didn’t tell anyone about it,”* Jack fumes.

“I didn’t say she was a *killer,* Jack. She just—”

“Lured eight innocent girls to their deaths, Will! And you let her go! Why the hell didn’t you at least call me as soon as you got back to Virginia?”

“I was going to! I-I just…I got…” Will is flustered and upset. He *really* doesn’t want to tell Jack about last night, but it’s obvious the man isn’t going to let this go.

“He called me first,” Hannibal lies smoothly. “I picked Will up from the airport, with every intention of going to you immediately but…” he pauses delicately. “I believe the stress of the situation, combined with the fact that Will has been feeling a bit under the weather for the past few days, may have triggered a sort of autoimmune response, for lack of a more precise term. He went into a heat unexpectedly and the both of us became…rather distracted for the rest of the evening.”

The stunned expression on Jack’s face would be almost comical to watch, if Will couldn’t feel his own face burning as well. He’s of half a mind to crawl and hide under Jack’s desk and not come out for the next thousand years or so, until his sense of shame and embarrassment wears away. Still, he can at least appreciate Hannibal’s slightly altered version of events and failure to mention the few hours he left Will alone that morning, implying that they were together the entire time since Will got back to Virginia and giving

him a solid alibi should Jack want to ask any more veiled questions about how Abigail's ear got to his house.

"Well," says Jack after taking a moment to recover, "there are a lot of things I could say about that, but obviously I don't have the time to get into it right now." He pins them both with a frosty glare as if to say, *Don't think we aren't talking about this later though.* It doesn't hold for very long, however, quickly crumbling into a more haggard, world-weary look as he lets out a sigh and says, "Will, in light of everything that's just happened, you realize I have no choice but to suspend you indefinitely."

He hadn't realized. He probably would have, had he been thinking clearly about anything apart from Abigail since Beverly's call, but hearing it now is like having a bucket of ice water dumped over him when he least expected it, painfully freezing him in place. "What, *no!* Jack, you can't! Abigail is missing, I need to be working on the case with you. I could help—"

"I think you've helped enough already!" Jack bellows. Will hunches his shoulders and shrinks back automatically. For the first time since the start of their working relationship, he can truly feel the gender gap between them as the Alpha angrily paces around the office and continues to berate him. Will has to bite his lip against the painfully Omegan urge to apologize and appease, only hoping at this point that he has enough control over himself not to break down like the last time Jack yelled at him.

"You're damn lucky I'm not firing you outright! You've been too personally involved in everything to do with this girl from the start. You went behind my back and withheld information from me, and now as a direct result Abigail Hobbs is almost certainly *dead!"*

Will recoils as if struck. A single sob escapes him involuntarily, and he turns around quickly so at the very least Jack doesn't see his face. Images of Abigail impaled on a bed of antlers fill his imagination, and he doesn't realize that he's still sobbing, hyperventilating really since there are no tears, until he feels a pair of strong arms surrounding him and a voice whispering at his ear that everything is alright. A gentle hand runs fingers through his curls and guides his head lower until his face is buried in the crook of Hannibal's neck.

Will takes the hint and breathes deeply, letting his senses be awash with Alpha pheromones and feeling himself begin to calm again almost immediately. He'll hate himself for this later, and for allowing himself to appear weak in front of Jack, but right now it's exactly what he needs. He clings to Hannibal tightly, afraid that if he lets go of the last anchor he has left he'll drift away completely.

Hannibal continues to stroke Will's curls and murmur soft words to him, glancing up only once to give Jack a hard recriminating look. Were his arms not currently full of hysterical Omega, he fears his own reaction to the other Alpha's outburst may be more openly hostile even than that. Jack at least has the decency to look discomfited and shamed by his own actions, perhaps only now remembering how ungentlemanly it is to yell at an Omega, especially one still mildly hormonal from being fresh off of a heat.

"Listen, Will," Jack says, tone mild and apologetic, "I can't let you work on this with how much you're already involved. Just…think of it as a temporary vacation from fieldwork for

awhile. To be honest, I think you could probably use the break anyway." Will says nothing in response to that, not even bothering to turn around or lift his head from Hannibal's shoulder.

Jack clears his throat and continues, "I'll give you some space to sort out whatever you need to. Take all the time you need." With that he steps out, leaving Hannibal and Will alone in his office.

Will steps back and keeps his eyes lowered, finding it even harder than usual to look at the older man's face. He only nods without glancing up when the Alpha asks if he's ready to go.

He ignores the arm that's proffered out for him to hold, choosing to walk ahead of the other man instead. He's done enough leaning on Hannibal already today. The last thing he needs is to lend further credence to the idea that he needs the support, even if that's technically truer than he cares to admit. It would only muddle things further between them.

About the time Hannibal lays a hand on his elbow to stop him so the Alpha can cut ahead and open the car door for him, Will snaps. "Enough! Stop it already," he says, yanking his arm away.

"Will?" the Alpha asks, one hand still on the open car door as he looks at him with a puzzled expression. "Is something wrong?"

Will releases a harsh, bitter laugh. "What isn't wrong today?" he asks. "Look, I…I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I'm not a delicate flower, Hannibal. You can cut the chivalrous attitude."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow at that. "I wasn't aware I was behaving any differently towards you than normal."

"What do you call that back there?" Will asks, jerking his head in the direction of Jack's office. "Are you like that with all of your patients?"

"You have never been my patient, Will," Hannibal says. "I hope you do not feel as Jack seems to, that I have behaved inappropriately in regards to our relationship."

"We don't *have* a relationship, Hannibal."

Hannibal shuts the door then and moves to stand closer, until Will has to tilt his head back to maintain steady eye contact with the man's nose. "Will," he says softly, "please don't do this."

Will closes his eyes and swallows. It's not fair that he should be so affected by the man's soft imploring tone. It's not fair that for all his self-imposed boundaries and forts that he's built over the years to keep this sort of thing from happening, he still managed somehow to drag Hannibal down into his own terrible broken world.

"I just can't, Hannibal. I can't deal with this…whatever this is," he says, gesturing between them, "right now. Not right after—not…not now, okay?"

He wonders then if he should be concerned by the reaction Hannibal gives—instead of the somber response that he expected, Hannibal's face seems to brighten and his lips curl up into a pleased smile. "What?" he asks warily.

"If that is your answer today, then I shall have to content myself for the time being on the knowledge that 'not now' is not the same as 'never,' William."

Will huffs out an involuntary laugh and passes a tired hand over his face. "You were the kind of kid who wouldn't accept being told 'no' very often, weren't you?"

"Dear Will, I have *never* accepted a defeat."

It's such an *Alpha* thing to say, but rather than get angry or irritated, Will can feel another smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "Get in the car already, Casanova. It's freezing out here."

"Will, *you* are the one who refused to get in. Had you not stopped me earlier, we could have been well on our way and quite warm long before now." Will waves him off dismissively, and with an amused smirk Hannibal takes a step back and opens the car door for him again. This time, Will doesn't complain and slides into the passenger seat.

Their short-lived amusement fades on the drive as Hannibal knew it would, the companionable quiet between them becoming again one of shared loss as both of them allow their thoughts to drift back to the reason for this impromptu trip.

"Maybe she…" Will starts to say before stopping himself, shaking his head as if to dispel a lingering unpleasant thought.

"You are not on the case anymore. Perhaps allow this to be the break you deserve, and leave the maybes and what-ifs to Jack and his team," Hannibal says. "Do not wear yourself out by trying to investigate on your own."

"Oh, you do *not* have to worry about that," says Will, exhaustion and cynicism dragging his syllables out in a low, deeper drawl than he would normally allow himself to fall back into. "I think I've seen more than enough already of what 'investigating on my own' seems to lead to."

Hannibal frowns. "Will, this is not your fault. Jack should never have said what he did."

"He was right to though," Will says. "It is my fault." Hannibal would do anything to dispel the younger man's despondency, but he is powerless in this. It is terribly frustrating, and he must distract himself instead for now with a wholly unsatisfying fantasy of one day turning Jack Crawford into a fine dish of braised tongue with lentils.

As they pull into Will's driveway and park, Hannibal reaches out to grasp Will's hand with his own before the Omega can hurriedly flee to the safety and solitude of his home.

"Hannibal, what—" he starts to ask, cutting off abruptly as the Alpha raises their joined hands to his lips and kisses Will's fingers. Will turns his eyes away and swallows, blushing.

“Were you even listening to what I said before?” he asks, mortified to hear how shaky and lacking in conviction his own voice sounds.

“I was,” Hannibal says with a small smile. “However, I shall hold onto the hope that whenever you are ready to talk about it, you will at least be open to the possibility of giving me a chance.”

Will has no idea how to respond. It’s all he can do not to gape or ask bluntly, *How are you even real?* He has to wonder if the man would take it as an insult or a compliment if Will were to tell him how much he seems like a figure straight out of a Victorian novel when he does things like this, or how *weirdly into that* Will is starting to realize he might actually be.

Will only nods, unsure what else to do and unwilling to bet he can think of something intelligent to say without making an ass of himself. “I’ll, uh, let you know.” There, that’s vague enough. He squeezes Hannibal’s hand back once in a silent goodbye and quickly gets out before he can say something else to ruin it.

Hannibal drives home feeling lighter than he has since this morning, hopeful and eager now that the most difficult steps are behind him. Now he need only wait and give Will a little time to adjust and grieve before he can begin properly courting him in earnest.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> Personal headcanon: All of Will's dogs are named for a random assortment of interesting figures from history. For example, Winston would be named for Winston Churchill and Buster would be named for Buster Keaton. With that pattern in mind, can you guess how I'm going to name the other five? *Hint: I'm giving you two of them this chapter. ;)*
>
> Btw, considering how hectic work has gotten lately, I expect each of my stories will only be updated roughly once per month. I'll try for more often whenever I can, but no promises I'm afraid. I am a dreadfully slow writer. Sorry, my dears. :/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Will is being completely honest with himself, he has to concede that Jack and Hannibal may both have a point regarding his need for a break from crime scene investigations. The nightmares haven't stopped—not that he expects they ever will, considering he's lived with them since childhood—but they have decreased in frequency and…vividness. He also hasn't hallucinated anything in a long time and, as far as he knows at least, hasn't been sleepwalking either. He wonders if it could really be as simple as that, and if so, what it means for the future. Would Hannibal take it to mean this work isn't good for him after all and tell Jack that it's irresponsible to allow Will to consult for the BAU anymore?

Will scowls at the thought. He knows that his worry comes less from the possibility that Dr. Lecter may genuinely have professional concerns he might want to share with Jack about Will's mental wellbeing, and more from an irrational fear that the Alpha may decide that law enforcement is unsuitable work for "his" Omega and overstep his boundaries, taking advantage of the unique position he has as Jack's unofficial advisor on all things concerning Will Graham regardless of the Omega's previous insistence that they're not actually *dating*.

Will has to tamp down on the vague resentment he feels about the power Hannibal unwittingly holds over his career, reminding himself that the man would never do something so unprofessional or so obviously against Will's own preferences. Hannibal has been nothing but considerate and respectful for as long as he's known him. It's paranoid and unfair of him to even consider it a possibility, but his innate mistrust of Alphas runs deep, and is more difficult than ever to ignore with the evidence of Hannibal's own perceived dominance over him written plainly on his neck.

The man himself has been conspicuously absent for the last couple of weeks since Jack suspended him, respecting Will's wishes and granting him the space he asked for. The most they've spoken has been twice over the phone, when Will called politely to cancel their appointment for the next day. He had half-expected the man to insist on more frequent

contact to check in on him, considering the reason for Will's suspension in the first place, and feels absurdly grateful that Hannibal instead seems to understand Will's need to grieve alone.

Jack can't suspend him from teaching at least. Will doesn't know what he would have done with himself if he didn't have papers to grade or lectures to give. Still, it only occupies him for so long before he's left to his own thoughts again. To fill in the gaps between, he's resorted to longer walks with the dogs, fixing motors, reading, doing anything and everything he can to distract himself.

He tried fishing once, a few days ago, before the first snows fell and blanketed the ground in white. *Tried* being the operative word. He hadn't gone further than bundling himself up in warm clothing against the winter chill and merely *reaching* for his pole and other supplies before he'd seen it—still wrapped neatly in ordinary brown paper and twine, now gathering dust on the shelf next to his tackle box.

He'd meant to throw it out months ago, after he chickened out of giving it to Abigail as he originally intended, but a moment's indecision had caused him to waver, setting it aside with his own fishing gear rather than tossing it in the bin where it belonged. *Maybe,* he'd thought back then. *Not now, but maybe one day.*

Will ended up not going out that morning after all. He had instead spent more hours than he would dare ever admit to anyone curled up in one of the dog's beds on the floor, clutching tightly to Winston—who had wandered near to curiously sniff at his master and offer a few sympathetic licks—and crying softly into his fur until the others eventually started whining and pawing at him to be let outside.

Will sighs, looking up from the steadily dwindling stack of student papers on his desk to watch the snow fall outside. He definitely won't try fishing again today. Even if he wanted to, the weather wouldn't be ideal. It's light enough at least, however, that he can let the dogs run around for a bit and watch them play from the other side of the screen door.

Almost as an afterthought, he picks up his neglected tumbler of whiskey, the ice now melted and causing a wet ring to form in the wood of the desk, and raises it to his lips. He had poured it for himself much earlier—having decided in a moment of caprice that *fuck it, propriety be damned, he could have a drink in his own house at ten in the goddamn morning if he wanted to*—and promptly forgotten about it as he started grading and allowed himself to become absorbed in his students' banal and monotonous thesis statements.

Apparently his body has other ideas, however. Before he can even take a sip, his nose crinkles at the smell that hits his nostrils and his stomach curls in disgust. Perhaps he's not much of a day drinker after all. He sets it back down untouched with another irritated sigh.

The sound of excited barking makes him look up again. Albert and Ella are both bounding up eagerly toward a car pulling into the driveway, a few of the other dogs tilting their heads and watching curiously, looking dangerously like they're about to follow suit. Will has to open the screen door and whistle to call them back, though fortunately all of them spent enough time out in the streets before Will found them to know better than to get directly in the way of a moving vehicle. He relaxes even before he can see the driver clearly through the windshield, recognizing the car and who it belongs to immediately.

“What’s up, poochies?” Beverly says as she’s swarmed by seven curious dogs before she can even step out of the car. “Graham!” she calls out, laughing, as Will steps out onto the front porch. “Jack wasn’t kidding about how many dogs you have. You’re like the crazy cat lady of canines.”

Will rolls his eyes but can’t help the pleased grin that forms because of her presence. He whistles again and all seven of them disperse, running back into the house when Will opens the screen door for them. “Need help?” he asks as she gets out, juggling a couple of plastic grocery bags and a thin square cardboard box that better be what he thinks it is.

“Nah, I got it,” she says, climbing the steps and brandishing the box in front of her with a flourish. “Your pizza, sir,” she says as she comes to stand in front of him, waggling her eyebrows suggestively. Will snorts and refrains from making the obvious joke she’s clearly going for, *‘Hey, I think I saw this in a movie once,’* taking the box from her hands so she can step inside ahead of him. “It’s a little early for pizza,” he answers stoically instead as he follows her in, and pretends he can’t feel his stomach grumbling at the heavenly smells wafting up from the box. Maybe he shouldn’t have skipped breakfast this morning.

“Little early for this too, isn’t it?” she asks, dropping the bags unceremoniously on the couch so she can snatch up the glass of whiskey still sweating on his desk. “Looks like I’m not the only one ready to get the party started.”

This is what he gets for inviting an FBI analyst into his home, even if her visit is otherwise actually a rather pleasant surprise. He braces himself for the lecture that’s sure to come, that he *knows* would have come already had it been Alana standing in his living room to see this.

Instead she raises the glass in a cheery salute and knocks half of it back in one gulp. “Ugh, did you cut this with water?” she asks. “That’s weak.”

“Well, it’s not even noon yet,” he quips, the last of his tension bleeding out of his shoulders as he realizes she’s not going to pass judgment. “And *please,* do help yourself,” he adds sarcastically as she takes another swig. “Just not too much unless you plan on crashing on my couch tonight.”

“Aww thanks, Mom,” she says, dropping back onto the couch with enough force to bounce a little. “I think I will,” she adds, patting a small overnight bag he hadn’t noticed amidst the grocery bags on the seat next to her.

He sets the pizza down on the coffee table, *tss*ing at the dogs that come sniffing to shoo them away. “Not for you,” he tells them. “You guys are spoiled enough as it is.” He should have warned Hannibal against ever bringing them sausages. Now they seem to beg him for scraps of human food more often than they ever had before.

Beverly cups her hand around her mouth and stage-whispers to the dogs, *“We’ll wait until he’s not looking.”*

“Don’t encourage them,” Will says. He sits in one of the armchairs opposite and just *looks* at her for a moment. “So,” he says.

"So," she says back.

"What are doing here, Bev?"

"What does it look like I'm doing here, Will?"

Will sighs. He really hoped she'd be more forthcoming and direct about this. "I get how it must look to everyone else, but I'm fine. Really. I don't need you checking up on me like this."

"Who said anything about checking up on you?" Beverly asks. "I'm just here to chill with a friend, steal his booze and eat pizza together while watching cheesy horror." To make her point, she pulls out a handful of rental DVDs from one of the plastic bags. "I'm pretty stoked about this one. It's about a killer snowglobe. A *killer snowglobe,* Will. Come on, how can you not be into that?"

Will huffs out a laugh. "I admire your dedication to the lie, if not your taste in movies," he says, leaning forward to pick one of them up and look dubiously at the synopsis written on the back.

"Do you know how long it took me to find a rental place that doesn't have boarded-up windows? All because *somebody* thinks it's cool to live out in the sticks where the wifi connection is too lousy to run Netflix."

"Mm," Will hums agreeably. "Okay."

"Okay?" she asks, eyebrow raised.

"Okay. Let me get my laptop so we can watch something."

She makes a show of looking around the room while he stands up to retrieve his canvas bag, although he's sure she must have noticed the layout already as soon as she walked in. "Of course you would be one of those weirdoes who doesn't even own a TV," she says.

"Ouch," he says, resting a hand over his heart. "Do you treat all of your friends this poorly?"

"What do *you* think?" she asks.

"I think Jimmy and Zeller are probably glad they weren't invited," he answers. That earns him an elbow to the ribs as he takes a seat next to her and sets his laptop up on the coffee table where the pizza box used to be, now open and cooling on Beverly's lap.

"Here," she says, shunting the box onto Will's lap so she can grab a DVD to put in. "Ladies first. Eat before it gets cold."

"Funny," he says flatly.

"Ooh, sorry. I say that to Jimmy and Zee all the time, but I guess it's actually kind of a sore spot for you, huh?"

“There are some people who assume my gender means I’m supposed to behave with a certain level of…*grace,* I suppose.”

Beverly looks him over, taking in his jeans, the pizza in his lap, the faded old sweater worn thin to the point where there are nearly holes in the elbows. She manages to keep a straight face for maybe two seconds before busting out laughing.

“It’s not *that* funny,” he says, trying to sound offended, a difficult feat to manage when Beverly isn’t the only one chuckling by this point.

The movie starts. They each grab a slice of quickly cooling pizza that seems to be laden with a little of everything, even *pineapples.* “Who’s the weirdo now?” he grumbles, and Beverly shoots him a dirty look, unable to fire anything back while her mouth is still full.

Will takes a bite, and all of his remaining protests about his least favorite fruit being added to the list of ingredients fall away. Maybe it’s just the fact that he hasn’t eaten yet today, but it tastes *amazing,* pineapples and all. The only thing that could possibly improve it would be Hannibal’s deft touch. Will tries to imagine the kind of organic, gourmet spin he’s sure the Alpha would put on such a dish to make it suitable for his own refined palate. *I wonder if I could ask him to make it for me.*

Will blushes as he realizes the direction his thoughts have strayed to, and stands hurriedly, hoping Beverly hasn’t noticed. “I’m, um, going to get something to drink,” he says.

“Booze is that way,” she says, pointing at the table where he makes his lures as he heads for the kitchen instead.

“Huh? Oh. Yeah, you can have some more if you want. Help yourself.”

He comes back less than half a minute later. “Damn,” she mutters when she glances over at the glass of water in his hand.

“What?” he asks, taking a sip.

“I was kind of hoping to get you drunk before I asked,” she admits.

“Asked me *what?”* he says with an amused smirk, setting the glass down a fair distance away from his computer. She side-eyes him.

“Where you got that fabulous hickey from, for one.”

He’s glad he set the glass down already, else he surely would have dropped it. His hand flies up automatically to the bite on his neck, plainly visible above his casual *uncollared* shirt. Christ, he hadn’t even *thought.*

“We can even make a game of it if you want,” she says, presenting him with a smile that looks downright *wicked.*

“No.”

“I’ll tell you how *I* think you got it—”

“No.”

“—And you can tell me if I’m right or not.”

“Definitely not.”

“I’m thinking an older gentleman,” she says, turned fully to face him now, no longer even feigning attention to the movie.

“This is a very engrossing film you’ve picked out for us, Beverly,” he says robotically, eyes glued to the screen so he doesn’t have to look at her instead.

“Tall. Intense. Really well put-together.”

“Thought-provoking even. Raises some interesting metaphysical questions about the nature of being.”

“Kinda smokin’ hot actually, in a really stuffy, oh-yes-spank-me-headmaster sort of way. Know what I mean?”

“Oh look, someone’s dying already,” he says loudly, fighting hard to ignore the heat he can feel rising on his cheeks again.

Beverly reaches over and closes the laptop lid, effectively cutting off the horrified screams of the snowglobe’s first victim mid-shriek.

Will reluctantly turns his head to gaze steadily at her chin.

“Hey, if you’re worried I’m gonna tell the boss man, you can relax. This stays between us, okay? Well, us and my boy toys. I tell them pretty much everything, sorry. But I won’t if you really don’t want me to.”

“Jack already knows,” Will says. He almost slaps a hand over his own mouth as he realizes what he just admitted to her.

“Yes, I *knew* it!” she crows. She rubs her hands together then and cackles gleefully. “Am I allowed to tell Zee? Please tell me I’m allowed to tell Zee. He owes me fifty bucks if I do.”

“You placed bets?” he asks weakly. He really should be more alarmed by this news than he is. Or at the very least surprised. “Just how many people did you tell your…suspicions to?”

“Just Zee and Jimmy, I swear.”

Will groans. He’d rather hoped there would at least be one person he could still look in the eye at work without embarrassment. As much as he can ever look anyone in the eye, that is.

“So how did it happen? Come on, Graham, tell me the good stuff.”

“Beverly Katz, you are the devil.”

“I know,” she says. “But flattery will get you nowhere. *Spill.”*

Will doesn’t want to tell her the truth, that he doesn’t remember much of what happened that night. “You don’t have to if it makes you uncomfortable,” she says in a more serious tone, sensing his reluctance to talk about it. “In fact, I’ll tell you one of my secrets so we’re even. Something the boss man doesn’t know. Not that it would hurt anything if he did, I mean it’s not really his business but…y’know. It’s *Jack,”* she says, shrugging, as if that explains everything, which in a way it kind of does.

“Is it more embarrassing than mine?” he asks, feeling a smile creep back onto his face in spite of himself.

“I’m not embarrassed,” she says, “but you know me, I have no shame. Neither does Jimmy for that matter. Zee on the other hand…I think he was raised Catholic, so it kind of makes sense he’d be weird about it at first, but we think he’s coming around.”

“I don’t…I’m not sure I understand…” Will starts to say before it *clicks.* “Oh! You mean… the *three* of you?” She waggles her eyebrows at him again like she had on the porch. Will laughs. “Okay, *wow.* How long?” he asks.

“About a month?” she says, phrasing it as a question while she casts her mind back, trying to remember. “Yeah. About a month,” she repeats, nodding. The smile on her face is like nothing he’s seen on her before, almost shy as she uncharacteristically tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. Will thinks she’s much more nervous about revealing this to him than she wants to let on.

“Well,” he says, smiling warmly at her, “congratulations.”

“Thank you,” she says sincerely. *“So,* do I get to say it back or…?”

Will bites his lip, thinking. “I don’t know yet,” he says honestly. “I just, I still have a lot to sort out and I…I don’t know.”

“Okay. Just let me know when you do,” she says, matter settled. “Or whenever you want to talk about it.” She doesn’t push or assume anything, and for that Will thinks he could kiss her.

“I will,” he answers, and surprises himself by meaning it. He *wants* to tell her when the time comes. How unusual for him. So this is what friendship feels like.

“It stopped snowing,” she says, looking over his shoulder through the window outside. “Want to take me on the grand tour?” she asks, poking him playfully in the arm.

“Sure, just let me get my coat.”

It’s nice, and almost nothing like the time he asked Alana to go on a similar trek with him across his property. That had been pleasant in its own way too, walking quietly in the other Omega’s gentle, understanding company as they searched for a wounded animal that Will

now realizes may or may not have even existed. There had been banter then too, but laced with awkward flirtatious overtures on his part that he's embarrassed to think of now.

There's nothing awkward about hanging out with Beverly. She's almost as rambunctious as Will's youngest pups, laughing wildly as she wrestles a stick from Buster's mouth and tosses it out for him to fetch, only to watch as seven eager canines rush off at once to retrieve it. They both probably look ridiculous, running around with an energetic pack of strays like a pair of excitable children, but it's the most fun Will has had in the company of another human being in a long time.

They eventually tire enough to slow to a walk while the dogs run ahead of them, bouncing back and forth between different topics as they talk. On the subject of work, Beverly mentions a killer who climbed in through a hole in the roof and murdered a girl in Delaware a few days ago.

"No motive? Are you sure it was random?" he asks. Something about that doesn't sit right with him, maybe if…

"Will," Beverly says warningly, disrupting his thoughts. "You're off investigating for now, remember? Don't worry about it. We've got this."

"Do you have the file with you? Maybe I could look over the pictures—"

"I don't, and even if I did, I wouldn't let you look at it," she tells him firmly. "I'm sorry, Will. I shouldn't have even brought it up."

"Bev, I could help. You know I could help. I'm sure Jack would look the other way. It's just Abigail's case he doesn't want me working on really."

"He didn't just take you off of that case, Will. He *suspended* you. Believe me, I know Jack would love to have you working with us again," she says. "I can tell he's getting frustrated not having you around. He's shown amazing restraint not calling you back in already to be honest. And I'm glad he hasn't yet," she admits, turning to look him up and down. "You look good, Will. Nice healthy glow to your skin and everything. You look better than you did when we met. This break is obviously good for you."

Will sighs. "I need to do something. I feel like I've been losing my mind these past couple of weeks."

"I feel like you were probably losing your mind before that."

"Thanks," he says sardonically.

"Don't mention it."

Thoughts of what she already told him are spinning around in his head, although blurry and grey with nothing but her own words to describe it. The tarp stapled to the roof. Water stains on the bedroom ceiling from the snow coming in. Blood on the wooden floor. A pretty young girl's face ripped apart and peeled back like a mask.

“The killer knew her. No, *listen.* The killer knew her. They felt…betrayed by her somehow. Like she wasn’t really who they thought she was or…something,” he says, shaking his head. Too much is vague and incoherent without him being able to look at the scene itself. There’s no way he can convince Beverly to tell him *where* in Delaware the crime took place, however, and if it really was a few days ago then the cleaners should have already done their sweep of the place by now anyway. Will has the niggling feeling that whatever window he might have had to do something has already been lost before Beverly ever told him about it. “They may never do something like this again.”

“Let’s hope not,” she says.

“It’ll make them that much harder to catch. It might even be too late already.”

“Well, nothing we can do about it then. Sometimes the bad guy gets away.” She shrugs. “It happens. Not every case gets wrapped up nicely with a shiny red ribbon, Will. And *don’t* tell me things would have gone differently if you were on this,” she says. “Cuz that may be true, or it may not be, but either way you’re not coming back until Jack says you’re coming back. End of story.”

Will breathes in deeply, closes his eyes, and *lets it go.* “Fine, you’re right. Let’s talk about something else.”

Beverly slings a companionable arm over his shoulders, and decides to regale him with a story of the time she convinced Brian to try on one of her skirts on a drunken dare.

Chapter End Notes

~~Yes, Team Sassy Science is my totally non-platonic OT3, shhh don't you dare judge me, I will eat you!~~ And Will and Beverly are naturally my brotp, because *duh.* xD

And yes, the snowglobe movie is very real. No, I haven't seen it yet ~~because I'm afraid to. The pessimist in me says it's probably nowhere near as glorious as I'm imagining, and I've been let down too many times before.~~

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Not to sound braggy, but I think you're gonna like this chapter. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes up shivering in the cold, the covers all but entirely yanked away from his body and wrapped snugly around Beverly's slumbering form. The woman snores like a freight train and he can see a thin line of drool slowly staining the pillow beside her head.

It's so oddly endearing that he can't even be annoyed by the chilly awakening, feeling a sudden burst of fondness for the Beta even as he snickers silently to himself and picks up his cell phone on the bedside table to record a short video. For future posterity's sake, of course. Certainly not for blackmail purposes or to get back at her for the bet she made with Zee about him and Hannibal. Nope. Not at all.

That done, and still with a silly smile on his face, he slips on a robe over his night attire—a t-shirt with *actual* pajama bottoms for once because while he may be comfortable around Katz and not very "ladylike," he still has his dignity and a sense of what is considered appropriate behavior in front of a houseguest instilled in him by his father.

With a soft snort, he realizes this is the first time in his life he's ever participated in what could be considered a *slumber party,* since sharing a hotel room with a colleague on a work trip or staying the night after a date wouldn't count. It's not an experience he ever felt like he was missing out on as a teenager, especially with his limited knowledge of television and movies telling him what it boiled down to was a bunch of giggling Omegas and Beta girls doing each other's makeup while gossiping and whispering about Alpha and Beta boys they liked.

A teenaged Will would have never gone for something like that, being far too much of a "typical boy" back then despite his Omegan status to even consider such feminine pursuits, far more interested in hiking outdoors or tinkering with cars. He would have sooner invited over a guy he could talk shop with, but with a dad as overprotective as his, Hell would have frozen over first. His adolescence was a limbo of isolation and estrangement from others, some of it his own doing, some of it his father's, and some of it a natural by-product of faulty societal expectations. He imagines it would have been something of a relief for him and his dad both if he could have made a friend like Beverly back then.

He pads barefoot into the kitchen, careful not to creak any floorboards that might wake his sleeping guest or the dogs, and turns on the coffee maker. He stands there waiting patiently, hands resting gently on the countertop, when he feels the familiar vibration of his phone going off in his robe pocket.

He fumbles it out of his pocket and answers a second before it can start ringing, muttering an uncertain *"Hello?"* under his breath since he didn't have time to check the caller ID first.

"Will," says Hannibal's voice on the other end, his tone a mixture of pleasure and surprise. There is a fluttering in Will's chest at the sound, cropping up annoyingly without his permission. *"I was uncertain you would even be awake. I did not expect you to pick up so quickly."*

"Well, uh…" Will stumbles awkwardly in his speech, impeded as much by the hushed tone he's speaking in as by the fact that he has no idea what he wants to say. He walks to the kitchen window furthest from the living room so he can at least speak up a little more.

"Are you not alone? I apologize if I am intruding."

"No, no, you're not intruding," Will reassures him. "I mean, I'm not alone. Bev's here but she's still sleeping." Realizing how that probably sounds, he quickly elaborates, "She came over to watch movies last night and she'd been drinking, so I told her to stay." He refuses to think about why it matters to him so much that Hannibal not get the wrong idea.

"I am happy to hear you are spending some time with a friend, rather than isolating yourself completely." Will bites his lip a bit guiltily even though Hannibal seems to really mean it. At the very least, he can't hear any reproach in the Alpha's tone at having been neglected all this time.

"She sort of inflicted her company upon me whether I wanted it or not," he says wryly by way of explanation as well as roundabout apology.

"Then perhaps you will allow me a similar imposition," says Hannibal with amusement.

"Oh?" asks Will faintly, suddenly fearing that the man intends to show up at his doorstep just as Beverly had done.

"Would you care to join me for dinner this evening?"

"Oh," Will repeats with some relief, then realizes what an idiot he will sound like if he keeps saying that like it's his new favorite word. *Get it together, Graham.* "I really shouldn't. I need to catch up on my grading."

"Very well. Then how does this Friday sound?"

"You're very persistent, Doctor."

Hannibal chuckles at that. *"It seems to be the best way to get your attention."*

"Okay. Friday," he says, very glad the man can't see the heat rising in his cheeks. "What time?"

"I should have everything ready by seven."

“Great. I’ll see you then.” He hears a low wolf whistle as he hangs up and turns around. Bev is standing there, her clothes still rumpled and her hair a mess, but clearly alert as she steps into the room to pour herself a cup of coffee. “Was that Hannibal?” she asks far too innocently, shattering the illusion mere seconds later by following it up with, “Hot date on Friday, huh?”

“It’s not a date,” he protests immediately, stridently ignoring the panicked voice in his head going, *Oh god,* is *it a date?* “It’s just dinner between two friends.”

“Uh huh, says that dopey little smile I saw on your face earlier, I think *not.”*

“Shut up and go comb your hair. You look like a weasel burrowed in there and set up house.”

“Wow,” she says, setting her mug down on the counter for emphasis. “Say that again with just a bit more sass and you’ll sound *exactly* like that fussy southern belle I always knew you were deep down.”

Will rolls his eyes, and decides that under no circumstances should Beverly Katz ever be allowed to find out about the high school counselor who tried to convince him it would be in his best interests to enroll in an Omega finishing school instead of college during his senior year. He’s certain he’ll never hear the end of it about “missed opportunities” should she ever dig that information up.

After she leaves and Will is left to his own devices again, he wonders about what’s going to happen on Friday. What he even *wants* to happen. It will be the first time in over half a month that he and Hannibal have seen each other. So much has changed all at once. Will wishes he could hit a reset button to put things back the way they were before, but he’s not even sure what he would do differently if he could—besides never take Abigail back to Minnesota, obviously.

He grits his teeth against that depressing line of thought and tries to focus his mind elsewhere for the rest of the week, and does so with surprising success. He goes through the motions of grading, giving lectures, and even remembers to take time out one afternoon to get a haircut before it can become unruly and unmanageable. Each day that passes brings him one day closer to seeing Hannibal again, and the level of anticipation and nerves that thought fills him with is definitely not something he can write off as nothing.

A decision has to be made here, and he goes back and forth on which direction he leans more heavily toward *constantly.* It’s undeniable at this point that there is a mutual attraction between them, but Will’s personal history with relationships is weak at its best and utterly *disastrous* at its worst. He doesn’t want to ruin one of the most profound and fulfilling human connections he’s ever made in his life if this whole thing goes down in flames.

And as much as he hates to admit it, because at this point it feels more like a personal failing than a legitimate precaution, a part of him is still bothered by the thought of giving that much of himself over to an Alpha in *any* capacity. He has to remind himself at times that this isn’t some elaborate trap he’s walking into—this is *Hannibal Lecter* for god’s sake, and it’s just *dinner.* The paranoid inner voice that always sounds suspiciously like his father’s really needs to stop trying to warn him against dangers that don’t exist.

By Friday morning he is still undecided, his body feeling like little more than a jumble of frayed nerves, so much so he has trouble even keeping down breakfast. By afternoon he's staring into his closet and scratching his beard in puzzlement, wondering if he should be dressing casual like today is nothing special—just another meal at a friend's house—or if he should be treating this whole affair more seriously and whether his attire should reflect that. He ultimately decides on a compromise, digging out his nicest pair of jeans but forgoing the usual plaid in favor of a light blue shirt and dark fitted jacket.

He showers next, the hot water and steam going a long way toward loosening his muscles and helping him to relax. He steps out and wipes the fog away from the mirror with his hand. The sight of his own reflection gives him pause.

He lifts his hand to the side of his face and rubs his beard just as he had done earlier, considering. Years ago he had decided he preferred having it over not. It gave him something rough and nondescript to hide behind, another barrier between himself and the rest of the world. It feels like silly reasoning now in light of everything else that has happened. No amount of hiding or running can change what he is and has always been—an Omega.

He does it quickly before he can talk himself out of it, lathering up his face and pulling the razorblade down in swift, smooth strokes, hands steady and certain. The result is about what he expected, giving his face a smooth, clean feeling but also making him look softer and about fifteen years younger than he should.

The claiming bite even appears to stand out sharper in comparison. He sighs. Nothing for it now—it'll take ages to grow back in properly since Omegas don't typically have much facial hair to begin with. Oh well. Hopefully Hannibal will like it at least.

The thought takes him by surprise. He tosses the razor into the sink, bitter and frustrated without warning. *"What the fuck am I doing?"* he mutters angrily to himself, rubbing his hand over his eyes as though not seeing it will make it less apparent that he just went overboard *dolling himself up* for a *date* with an *Alpha.* Fuck.

"This is not going to work," he mutters some more, not so much angry now as he is tired and disgusted with himself. He drops his hand and looks into his reflection's eyes, stating, "That's it. That's what you'll tell him. 'I'm sorry, but this is just not going to work.' Easy. Decision made."

The familiar frown he's sporting now is incongruous somehow with his newly bared face. He can practically hear the Alpha men who used to walk up to him at bars without invitation in his twenties, all of them always drawling the same line, *"Pretty thing like you should be smiling more,"* standing too close and making him want to gag on the stench of stale cigarettes and cheap beer. He almost wishes one of them were here now. It would give him an excuse to *hit something.*

Hannibal Lecter is nothing like those other men, however. With Hannibal he knows that, while it may hurt, he can at least let the man down gently and trust that Hannibal will actually respect his wishes and let him go freely without trying to force the issue.

Will finishes getting ready, and after the dogs have been let back in and fed for the evening, he heads out, hoping his conviction won't waver again before he arrives at his destination.

*

Will arrives precisely on time, not a minute early or late. Hannibal smirks a bit to himself as he goes to answer the door, curious to know if it is merely an accident of happenstance or something the Omega deliberately planned so as to appear neither overeager nor entirely disinterested in seeing him.

The sight that greets him is enough to make his eyes widen a fraction in surprise. Much as he is unexpectedly rather fond of the gruff exterior his Omega normally chooses to bury his charms behind, he would be lying not to admit to himself that this lovely creature before him appears several steps closer to a fantasy he secretly harbors—a Will Graham that actually allows his Alpha to pamper him as much as he deserves, lying back so Hannibal can rub exotic, sweet-smelling oils into his skin and drape him in fine silks and furs like a prince.

Funny how he never ascribed to the idea of treating a male Omega like a rare and precious gift until he met one who never expected it or demanded it of anyone.

He must be telegraphing his thoughts again, for Will glances away from him and bites his lip nervously to hide a shy smile. Hannibal is tempted to lay his hand over the exquisite flush creeping along Will's pale bared cheek, to feel the heat and smoothness there against his palm, but he suspects by Will's anxious demeanor that he would not react well at the moment to such a forward gesture.

"You gonna invite me inside anytime soon?" Will asks, deflecting with humor despite the obvious tension still visible in his hunched shoulders.

"Of course," says Hannibal, blinking once in mild embarrassment at his lapse in good manners. He opens the door wider and stands aside to allow Will to enter. "Please come in."

With the Omega closer as he squeezes past, Hannibal realizes there is more improvement to his appearance than a cleanshaven face and a well-fitting outfit. He looks far better rested than last they saw each other for one, and his skin and hair have a more lustrous, healthier look to them as well.

"You look radiant," he says softly as he steps behind Will to remove the man's jacket from his shoulders and hang it up for him, admiring the blush that renews more brightly than before at the compliment.

This near, his scent is too enchanting to ignore. Hannibal leans in surreptitiously to breathe it in more deeply at the back of his neck, catching something new to Will's natural musk, something rather…*unique.*

"Did you just smell me?"Will asks.

"Difficult not to with that aftershave," Hannibal quips, playing off his smile as a teasing smirk when it wants to be something far more. A joyous grin perhaps.

Will chuckles. “Yeah, I, uh, keep getting it for Christmas,” he says, rubbing his hand over his smoothed cheek self-consciously. “Probably as a not-so-subtle hint to get rid of the beard actually.” Hannibal allows his own smile to widen fractionally, Will seeming to remain blissfully unaware that the Alpha’s happiness could have any cause other than the shared mirth between them.

“If you will allow me a moment,” Hannibal says after leading Will to the dining room and pulling out a seat for him, the one closest to the head of the table on the right-hand side. “I will bring out our beverages with the first course shortly.”

Once safely out of view in the kitchen, he allows himself a moment to simply stand in the center of the room with his eyes closed and *feel,* temporarily overcome. He had hoped, but until tonight he couldn’t be sure. But he had smelled it faintly, subtly intermixed with Will’s normal scent—a higher cocktail of hCG, progesterone, and estrogen hormones than would usually be found in Will’s bloodstream.

His Omega is with child.

It takes all of the self-control he has to school his proud, overjoyed smile back into a more appropriate one for the occasion as he puts away the wine he had set out to pair with their meal and takes out of the refrigerator a nonalcoholic alternative he had also purchased for it, *just in case.*

Will is undoubtedly still ignorant of the new life slowly growing within him, so it is up to Hannibal for now to monitor his mate’s health and nutrition as best he can whenever they are together. A pity he cannot confiscate the alcohol in Will’s home or make dietary choices for him outside of the meals he personally prepares, but at this early stage in its development, the fetus is in no real danger of fetal alcohol syndrome or other preventable defects anyway. He will simply have to be patient and wait for those changes in Will’s diet to be made *after* the Omega learns of his own impending motherhood.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I chose sparkling water instead of our usual libations for this evening. There are some mildly acidic ingredients in both the salad and the main course that do not pair well with any wines,” he lies. Will’s palate is unrefined enough that he will not know the difference.

“No, that’s…probably a good idea,” Will says, masking the minimal disappointment he feels at not having something to fortify himself with throughout the evening. “I still need to drive home after this anyway.” It’s also probably for the best that he *not* risk getting drunk and making poor decisions in the Alpha’s presence, though he doesn’t say as much aloud for obvious reasons.

Their discussion at the table mostly stays away from very serious topics. Hannibal shares what he can about his work that does not break confidentiality agreements. Will talks about his classes and his students. There is no mention whatsoever of Will’s suspension, or of Abigail. The conversation is pleasant and engaging as always but plainly trivial, the unspoken agreement between them clear—that neither of them will bring up what they’re actually here to talk about until dinner is over.

If Will, obviously aware of this fact, seems to linger more than necessary over each bite, savoring the loin on his plate with the bearing of a man who dreads what may come after the meal, Hannibal does not mind in the least. If anything, it allows him to bask longer in the appreciative noises his mate makes around mouthfuls of the investment banker who cut him off in heavy traffic last week. The Beta had been energetic and vigorous even for a man in his twenties, clearly one very conscious of his own fitness and keen on maintaining it.

Their child will be well-nourished, and grow to be healthy and strong.

He can see the tensed set of Will's shoulders return when they adjourn to the den, and forestalls whatever unpleasant thing the Omega is clearly trying to steel himself to say with the promise of coffee and dessert upon his return from the kitchen.

Will slumps forward a bit in his chair by the fire and smiles, relieved at the excuse for more delay and distractions. "You shouldn't go to this much trouble for me," he can't help but say when the man returns with a tray which he slides onto the small table between their seats, lifting from it a small plate of some elegant-looking chocolate gateau to hand to Will.

"Will, please, it is no trouble at all," Hannibal says, and for some reason Will chooses this moment to look up into the man's eyes. What he sees there—*Let me do this. Let me show you how I can provide for you*—is enough to steal his breath and make him glance away guiltily, shutting his eyes. "Hannibal…" he tries to say.

He hears the plate being set back on the tray, but doesn't open his eyes until he feels a firm but gentle hand grasping his chin and tilting it *downwards.* Hannibal is no longer standing over him but kneeling, much like he had done that morning at Will's house, the Alpha looking up at him from a traditional place of submission to make his appeal. Will's heart thunders in his chest at the implication. *Stop, stop, this is backwards, what are you doing…*

"Will," Hannibal says, his voice quiet and determined, the firm hold on Will's chin enough to keep him from tearing his eyes away once more, "whatever fears or mistrust you may still harbor, know that they are completely unfounded with me."

Will shifts uncomfortably at being more or less called out on his insecurities. "You could have anyone you wanted," he blurts out suddenly. A smart, cultured thoroughbred Alpha like Hannibal, *of course he could.* "Why are you wasting your time with me?" *An intractable Omega with obvious mental issues and a pathetic fear of intimacy,* he means.

Hannibal finally stands then, taking Will's hands in his own and forcing the Omega to rise out of his chair with him. "Being with you is not a waste of time, Will Graham," he says almost sternly. His tone belies something fierce and intense that Will might not have expected out of the sophisticated doctor, had he not seen him after the fight with Budge. "You are exactly what I have always wanted, but had never hoped to find in my life before now."

Will feels so overwhelmingly, *stupidly* emotional all of a sudden, and some tiny, childish Omegan part of him wants to cry because it's just not *fair* of Hannibal to say things like that to him when he's worked so hard all of his life not to give into that side of himself, the side that wants to believe those words and soak them up into his skin and let them become a part of who he is.

Later, he might wonder how they got here, how he went from certain this would be the night he rebuffed Hannibal's romantic overtures for good to whimpering softly for more as the Alpha's lips closed over his own, a strong hand clamping over the back of his head and winding into his curls, tilting his head back and tugging him impossibly closer to the taller man.

He might wonder at how he, Will Graham, obstinate, unsociable Omega extraordinaire, went from being more-or-less content in his solitude most of the time and turned instead into this needy creature that shivers at the way Hannibal Lecter's hands alternate from light and gentle caresses over his arms and his back to nearly grasping, greedy strokes, and lets himself be led upstairs, the last of his protests swallowed up entirely by the time those hands start to slowly, painstakingly strip him bare.

The truth is Will Graham is not, despite what uncharitable sources may say, unused to being viewed as an object of desire, but he can't remember the last time someone wanted him *this much,* or treated him with so much care throughout the process. The Betas he's slept with in the past had been less concerned with his pleasure than the novelty and excitement of getting to fuck a male Omega—it's the main reason he usually gravitates more towards women and other Omegas in particular.

Here, now, he feels like so much more than merely an exotic notch on someone else's bedpost or a passing ship in the night. Hannibal takes his time, seemingly determined to make Will melt into little more than a warm pile of incomprehensible goo before it's over. It's all he can do not to shudder right out of his body as Hannibal trails his fingers over every inch of skin he can find, discovering sensitive spots the younger man didn't even know he had, latching on with his teeth and his tongue, sucking lightly at the hollow of his neck and his nipples until Will is a mess of gasps and moans and high-pitched, keening, desperately *Omegan* noises he didn't even know his mouth could make.

He realizes, dimly along the edges of his subconscious, that this is probably something very different from their frenzied, heated first mating, when they would have both been impatient and clawing at each other like they were the last Alpha and Omega on earth, and Hannibal is perhaps in some small way trying to make up for the hurry they were in before by taking the time now to slowly and tortuously take Will apart before ever even seeing to his own needs.

Will is already dripping with sweat and slick and harder than he's ever been in his life by the time they finally take it a step farther. He almost doesn't expect it at first, until at last Hannibal presses into him so slowly and sweetly, Will's breath hitches in his throat. He keens and arches, wraps his legs high around the Alpha's waist and scratches his nails down his back, but Hannibal keeps up the same slow and leisurely swivel of his hips, gazing down in open admiration and a bit of smug pride at the desperate Omega falling apart in his arms, until Will leans up to whisper, *"Please, please,"* and nips at his earlobe before gently sucking it into his mouth.

Hannibal *slams* into him then, quickly setting a pace that has Will keening for an entirely different reason, as the friction against his neglected cock between their sweat-slicked bodies sends him spiraling unexpectedly into orgasm, distracted enough not to notice right away the mounting pressure building inside him until he is tightly knotted a few moments later,

Hannibal bracketing him more securely between his arms and sucking *hard* at the bite on Will's neck as he comes. Will can't honestly say that he minds, not quite remembering at this precise moment why it was so important to him before that the mark should fade.

"Hot damn, darlin'," he slurs out of breath, mind too far gone to even bother trying to hold his accent at bay any longer. Hannibal seems to enjoy hearing it anyway, if the surprisingly unguarded grin he wears now is anything to judge by.

His own accent is thicker as well as he delicately brushes a sweaty curl from Will's eyes and asks, "Does this mean you accept my petition to court you now?"

The clear ringing sound of startled laughter is the best answer Will can possibly give, at least until he recovers enough to reach up with one hand and pull Hannibal's head down for a long, probing kiss.

Chapter End Notes

~~Will someone please explain to me how in the hell I have somehow developed a 'deep southern accent fetish' when *I'm already from the friggin' south*?~~

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Will's accent makes another appearance this chapter. Other things happen, also. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Nausea. And cramps. Bad ones.”

“That’s fairly common right after a first heat after being on suppressants for so long,” Doctor Farber reassures him, clicking her pen to scribble a quick note on his chart. “And brief dry heats like the one you described aren’t as rare as you might think, especially after a few missed dosages. That, combined with stress at work or at home, it’s like the perfect cocktail for a bad explosion of hormones and achy limbs just waiting to happen.” Despite the mildly colorful phrasing, there is nothing unkind or patronizing about the Beta’s words, only a matter-of-fact bluntness that Will appreciates.

It’s the main reason he’s stuck with her all of these years since his move to Virginia, rather than hopping from one new OBGYN to another as he often had back home in his younger years, uncomfortable with the ones who were overbearingly sweet as though he were something delicate to handle with care *and* with the ones who were overly critical of his choices to stay on suppressants and not go looking for an Alpha to settle down with. Doctor Farber held no such judgments, and was quick and efficient with a dry sense of humor when the situation called for it.

All the same, Will would prefer not to tell her that he doesn’t *know* for certain whether he missed any dosages or not. He can only assume that’s what happened—between the lost time, the sleepwalking, and everything else that was going on at the time, he wouldn’t doubt it. He’s just grateful all of that seemed to clear up around the time he started his “vacation” from Crawford and the BAU. *Stress at work indeed.* If it had gone on for any longer, he would have been forced to admit the problem might be something else and gone to a neurologist, and *that* was not something he would have been comfortable with facing.

“The cramps are pretty new actually,” he says. “They only started yesterday morning.”

She *hmms* and pushes her glasses farther up her nose. “Well, that brings us to the other possibility,” she says, and Will swallows. “As a male Omega, your body isn’t as immediately...well-adapted, let’s say, for pregnancy as a female’s. A few weeks after conception, there will be a lot more adjusting and ‘restructuring’ going on in there than there would be for a woman, which would definitely cause some extra discomfort, yes.”

Will groans out loud. He knows this much already, of course—he remembers all too well the awful video they made him watch for Sex Ed class in almost every school he went to from

sixth grade to eleventh, the one touting male Omegas as “the most beautiful and unexpected miracle of Man’s creation.” By his final viewing of it at age sixteen, he’d already gained a better understanding of science than most of the teachers who’d shown it to him, and still remembers with a bit of undue satisfaction the scandalized expression on Coach Whitaker’s face when Will had snorted at the final line and stated loudly enough for the entire class to hear that there was nothing “miraculous” about a biological mutation that might have drowned happily in the gene pool ages ago if people weren’t stupid enough to keep breeding it back into existence on purpose.

Will had been a lot bitterer about his gender back in those days.

“Bright side is if it is that, it’s only the first pregnancy you ever have to experience that much discomfort, and it should only last for a few days so there’s that as well. I can prescribe something for the pain regardless if you’d rather not tough it out.”

Will bites his lip and considers for a moment. “No, it’s fine,” he answers finally. “How soon will we know?”

Doctor Farber smiles for the first time since his examination started. “It should just be a few minutes more. Mindy will let me know as soon as the results are ready.” She clears her throat and stands. “I’ll leave you to get dressed now,” she says. The door shuts behind her with a soft click.

Waiting has a quality of surrealism to it. He slips his clothing back on mechanically, crumpling up the ugly Pepto-Bismol pink gown that had been covering him during his physical exam—his one complaint about coming here, and even that is better than the ones with flowers and butterflies printed on them that he’s had to wear at other practices—and tossing it unceremoniously into the trash bin now that it’s outlived its purpose.

He’s nervous. A few days ago, he had felt so uncharacteristically content and at peace with his life that *of course* reality would choose now to rear its head and sweep the rug out from under his feet once again.

A few days ago he had woken up warm and well-rested, nestled snugly in the arms of an Alpha he could actually see himself trying a real relationship with, and had decided to finally *let go* of the last of his misgivings and see where being with Hannibal would lead him.

He’d woken the other man with a soft kiss on the lips, smiling into it as Hannibal’s arms shifted and tightened minutely around him as consciousness returned, the two of them only parting when Will’s stomach gurgled hungrily. They’d shared a breath of laughter over it, and after Hannibal’s offer to make breakfast Will had impishly suggested they have leftover cake since they had neglected dessert last night, fully expecting it to be dismissed as a joke by the fussy health-conscious Alpha. Instead he was seated beside Hannibal at the kitchen countertop in nothing but an oversized housecoat just a few minutes later, both of them giggling over identical plates of chocolate gateau in front of them like a pair of naughty children. It was almost too perfect to be real.

Not that it had actually *been* perfect. Almost an hour later, he had found himself bent over the toilet bringing half of it back up again, waving off the Alpha’s concern afterward with an

embarrassed shrug and a weakly voiced apology—maybe sweets so early in the day hadn't been such a good idea on his stomach after all. It hadn't even occurred to him at the time that it could be a sign of…something else.

That thought didn't occur to him until two days ago, when Bev had stopped by his faculty office on her lunch break and he had been tempted to throw her out on the spot, the smell of mayonnaise and Sriracha on her sandwich somehow powerful enough from across the room to make him want to retch even though her weird culinary choices had never bothered him before. The cramping had started the next morning and Will didn't hesitate—he was on the phone with Doctor Farber's receptionist before he had even poured kibble in the dogs' bowls.

What will it mean for them if he is pregnant? His relationship with Hannibal is way too tentative and new to be able to handle having another monkey wrench thrown into it already. What will it mean for his own life and his job at the FBI? Damn it, he's *not ready* for something like this!

Maybe his suspicions are wrong. Maybe the results will come back negative. Maybe—

A quick rap on the door bring his focus sharply back to the present and he immediately stands, attention rapt on Doctor Farber's face as she reenters the room.

"Well?" he asks, barely giving her time even to shut the door behind her, anxious to hear the verdict now and unwilling to listen to her try to couch it in some florid language she probably has to remind herself to do for her other patients. He's always found her refreshingly direct compared to most of his doctors. She doesn't disappoint now.

"It's positive," she answers matter-of-factly, and Will's knees miraculously don't give out from under him. He doesn't exclaim or shout. He doesn't react at all really, apart from the smallest lift of his brows and widening of his eyes beneath them. The thoughts that had been buzzing in his brain just a moment before now fall silent and still.

"Oh," he says softly, quietly, waiting for some internal voice to start shrieking in his brain or otherwise freak out on him. It doesn't.

"Now obviously this means if you're still taking your suppressants, you need to stop doing so now, effective immediately. As a matter of fact, throw them out altogether. I don't pretend to know how you feel about this news or where your head is at right now—"

"I don't know where my head is at right now," Will interrupts, voice still surprisingly even and lower in volume than it normally would be.

Doctor Farber smiles kindly at him once more. "And that's fine. There's still plenty of time to consider your options. You don't have to come to any kind of a decision today," she reassures him. Will only nods dumbly, eyes on the wall somewhere over her shoulder, unable to even feign trying to make eye contact. "But you do have to stop taking the suppressants, and I know it's a waste, but you can't go back on the ones I prescribed you before. If and when you decide you want them, whether that's weeks from now or months," she continues with a casual wave of her hand, "it'll be an easier transition on your body if we start you back on a lower prescription. Okay?"

Will nods again to show that he understands, though his thoughts are still blank and listless. He hasn't decided yet whether this is a good reaction to have, let alone a normal one.

"Congratulations!" the nurse Mindy tells him as he passes her on the way out, smiling through her even white teeth with all of the bubbly good cheer that her employer seems to lack. Will hopes the answering smile he gives actually looks enough like one instead of a grimace; he can barely feel the movement of his muscles well enough to tell.

When he gets to the car, he just sits there for awhile, engine off, hands loosely clasped over the steering wheel. Wonders what he should tell Hannibal, and when. It's disconcerting not knowing what he wants to do now, what should be done. The reality of his situation doesn't appear to have set in fully.

His phone pings, a reminder notification set to go off every few minutes whenever he has a missed call. A spike of anxiety jolts through him at the sound, the first recognizable emotion he's felt in several minutes. His imagination automatically jumps to the frustrated voicemail from Jack he's sure to find about some ugly scene he's supposed to be at, before he remembers that he doesn't currently work for the man. He lifts his phone out of the cupholder he left it in before he headed into the building and swipes. The call is not from Jack. It's from Hannibal. *Speak of the devil.*

He hits the green call button without thinking about it, without even checking first to see if the man left a message for him, and having no idea what he's going to say once the Alpha picks up. Should he just blurt it out over the phone?

He relaxes minutely when Hannibal answers, unaware of the way his muscles have tensed up until they loosen at the sound of his voice.

"You called?" he asks. A small worry buzzes at the back of his brain that he will have to think up a lie quick if the man asks why he didn't answer, but Hannibal doesn't ask.

"I was wondering if you wished to resume our weekly sessions starting tomorrow. You could join me again for dinner afterwards."

"No session," says Will, thinking of lesson plans he needs to prepare for next week after his classes end for the day. "We can do dinner though. How about my place this time?" he asks, suddenly sure he would prefer the familiarity of home for this particular chat. "That way I could do the cooking for a change."

"I was unaware you had any interest in the culinary arts."

"Believe it or not, Doctor, you aren't the only one who can handle himself in a kitchen. I got along just fine before I met you," he says, almost coy, tongue dipping over certain words and vowels into a once forgotten drawl he's noticed the other man seems to like when Will does it on accident. He's actually *flirting* right now, he realizes, and tries not to worry about whether or not their easy banter will still be the same after tomorrow.

The other man hums thoughtfully, and Will can't help poking further. "Worried I won't live up to your standards?"

"Never," Hannibal says firmly, leaving Will feeling strangely warmed and a little embarrassed by his tone.

Will makes a clucking noise between his teeth. "You probably should be. I'm not so good at that domestic stuff. I hope that's not something you were looking for in an Omega."

"I might disagree with that self-assessment. You do manage somehow to keep a surprisingly neat and tidy home despite the number of dogs you live with."

"Is it possible to feel offended, flattered, and mildly concerned for the future all at once?"

Hannibal chuckles amusedly at that. *"I have no intention of tying a pink apron around your waist or confining you to a life of housework and drudgery, if that's what you're asking."*

"As if you could," Will mutters. Though he can't hear it, Will imagines that almost imperceptible smile on Hannibal's lips widening even further.

"What do you plan to make, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Fried chicken," he answers immediately, his mind still on home and turning swiftly to thoughts of comfort food and childhood memories. "Maybe with some mashed potatoes, that sort of thing."

The almost stunned silence that follows for a few brief seconds is enough to make the corners of Will's mouth curl upwards, almost trembling from the way he presses his lips tightly together against it as though Hannibal will be able to tell that Will is smiling and know that it is at his expense.

"Will," the man on the other end of the line says with an exaggerated and much put-upon sigh that Will gleefully hopes will be the first of many, no matter how obviously fake. *"I believe you may recall a statement I made over our first shared meal together. I take great care in what I put into my body."*

"A little extra grease and butter than you're used to won't kill you."

"Hm. Not the most medically sound logic, I'm afraid. Quite the opposite, in fact."

"Hey now," he hears his own accent bleeding back into his voice again with a wry grin, "don't you go talking like that about the sacred body and blood of the South."

"My sincerest apologies. I did not realize the consumption of 'fried chicken' was on par with the taking of Holy Communion in that region."

"You have been woefully under-informed about the ways of my people then," Will says with mock solemnity.

"Then it is a good thing I have you to correct this gap in my knowledge. Is eight an acceptable time for you?"

“Sure.” He’ll need to buy the groceries he needs for it tonight to make sure he has plenty of time tomorrow. Breakfast food too if Hannibal stays overnight, and he should plan to wash the dogs, and—

“Will?” The voice on the other end sounds mildly concerned. *“You’ve gone very quiet. Is there something else you wish to discuss?”*

Will blinks at the question, then looks up slowly at the clinic door through his windshield. He’d almost forgotten he was still in the parking lot at Doctor Farber’s office.

“I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” he says softly.

Chapter End Notes

I may have made an itty bitty change to the tags, also. Can you spot the difference? ;)

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

> Lots of fluff ahead ~~and a terrifying reminder or two that Hannibal is a very scary, very possessive ubercontrol freak.~~ Ya know, just hannigram things. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Standing barefoot in his kitchen, the smell of chicken and rolls and other delicious scents wafting up to his nose, and singing right along with the likes of Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson belting out their tunes through the speakers of his laptop open on the dining room table, Will Graham feels more at home this evening in his quaint little house in Wolf Trap than he has in quite a long while. He almost expects to see his old man sitting in the room with him when he turns around, stealing one of the rolls his son just laid out on the table while the younger man isn't looking, or maybe just watching Will cook with a nostalgic smile on his face, too tired to sing along with him but tapping his foot softly to the rhythm on the linoleum.

The memory of his father being here brings a wider smile to Will's face and doesn't hurt the way it would have a couple of years ago. What does bring a pang to his chest, and an unconscious hand to his abdomen, is the thought that he'll never get to know for sure how the man would have reacted to the news of becoming a grandfather.

Probably, he would've driven all the way up to Baltimore in his truck and pounded his fist on Hannibal's door, ready to "have words at the fella" that knocked up his baby boy and demand to know what his intentions were, maybe even try to insist on throwing together a shotgun wedding. Will chuckles to himself, oddly cheered by the silly little fantasy as it plays out in his head. It would have been entertaining to say the least. Never was there a dull moment whenever Ned Graham was around.

Finishing up the last of the chicken, Will turns off the deep fryer and lays out the final pieces on the platter he set out, lined with paper towels to absorb the excess grease. He tosses the dogs some small, boneless scraps he set aside and left to cool just for them, as a reward for watching him patiently without begging and for not tracking any dirt inside today after he took the time to sweep the entire house and bathe all seven of them last night. Not that he wouldn't have probably given them some anyway, but they don't need to know that.

As he's checking the sides still simmering on the stove, Patsy Cline comes up next on his playlist. Listening to the Omega's rich warble always seemed to make his dad a bit more melancholy than usual, for reasons Will could probably guess if he lets his thoughts linger there for too long, but even as a kid she's always been one of his favorites. He croons along softly as he's turning down the burners and stirring the greens for a final time.

"Just remember 'til you're home again," he harmonizes*, "you belong to me…"*

"You have a lovely voice, Will." A large hand settles gently on his hip.

Will spins around, startled, wielding the wooden spoon he's holding defensively as he would a knife. Hannibal's smile is apologetic, but his eyes glint with amusement at the utensil in his hand, both of his own hands now resting on Will's hips.

"Jesus, Hannibal, you about gave me a heart attack," Will tells him, dropping the spoon to the counter with a half-embarrassed grin. "How do you even *do* that?" he asks, and brings his arms up to wrap loosely around the other man's shoulders, leaning up for a chaste kiss in greeting. It's not the first time the Alpha's quiet footsteps have taken him by surprise like this, but this is the first time it's ever happened in *his own home.*

"I'm sorry, my dear. I heard you singing outside and couldn't bear to let it end so soon by knocking. Fortunately for me, you left your door unlocked."

Will blushes in earnest and glances away, not sure if he's more embarrassed by the thought of Hannibal listening to him sing or the sentiment behind his words, as though his untrained vocals could somehow be even remotely on par with those of a professional at one of those fancy operas the Alpha no doubt attends. He's afraid to ask how long the man was listening for and opts instead to cast his gaze on the dogs watching them silently, narrowing his eyes at them in mock-indignation. "Some watchdogs you all turned out to be. Couldn't at least give a guy some warning before letting just anybody come in, huh?"

"I am hardly 'just anybody,'" Hannibal says, smirking. "I'm the man who brings them sausages."

"Yeah, well you better not have this time. They've been spoiled enough already today."

"Speaking of which," says Hannibal, stepping back to allow Will room to move at last and taking in deeper breaths through his nose to get a better scent of the room. "Smells wonderful."

"Oh, not too good for the grease and complex carbohydrates after all?" Will asks archly.

"I am willing to try anything at least once."

"We'll see about that," Will says. He shoos Hannibal toward one of the free chairs. "Have a seat. I'll be right back," he says, going to the table to close the laptop and set it out of the way on his desk in the living room. When he comes back, Hannibal has removed his jacket and set it on the back of the chair Will indicated, sitting as instructed and waiting patiently to see what Will will do next.

Will sets two empty plates at each of their places at the table, then brings over each individual dish separately. The platter of chicken goes next to the basket of rolls already sitting on the table, followed by turnip greens, mashed potatoes, and several ears of corn on the cob—the latter of which he had decided to include at the last minute, secretly gleeful at the thought of

prim and decorous Doctor Lecter possibly needing to ask for a toothpick or some floss afterward. Simple pleasures and all that.

Lastly he pulls out a pitcher from the fridge and pours them both two tall glasses of iced tea. He sits. “Well,” he says, gesturing to the numerous dishes now crowding the center of the table, “dig in,” and makes no bones about it as he uses his own fork and spoon to dollop helpings of each item onto his own plate.

Hannibal raises a mild eyebrow at the unusual arrangement, wondering if it truly is a cultural norm to present meals this way where Will is from, but he has no qualms about following Will’s lead. “You’ve certainly put a lot of work into this,” he says admiringly. True, there are more starches at the table than he would have chosen and the tea is sweeter than he would have made it, but he can more than appreciate the efforts and if the food tastes anything like it smells, it is certainly well worth the labor.

Will ducks his head and smiles down at his plate. “I owed it to you after all the lavish dinners you’ve made for me. I mean, I know this is nothing compared to that but—”

“This is exquisite,” Hannibal interrupts smoothly, deciding a little rudeness is warranted in this particular instance to cut off any further self-disparaging remarks.

“Says the man who hasn’t even taken a bite yet.”

Hannibal smiles and tilts his head in silent concession, then delicately picks up a chicken breast at the top of the pile and takes his first bite. He hums thoughtfully around his mouthful. “I believe I can understand the appeal,” he says after he swallows.

Will watches him, chin in hand, and grins at this pronouncement, finally removing his elbow from the table and turning to his own meal.

The two of them spend the rest of dinner enjoying each other’s company and catching each other up on what happened with them during the week—though perhaps not *everything* that’s kept them both busy. There are blocks of Hannibal’s schedule that he chooses not to share, time spent towards restocking his freezer. And Will, for his part, has not mentioned anything yet about yesterday.

Afterwards, at Hannibal’s insistence, Will allows him to help put away the leftovers and load up the dishwasher. Then he decides to break out the dessert he made last night—a lemon icebox pie. Hannibal praises it highly, considering it just the right amount of tart and sweet without being too overbearing. His eyes crinkle in amusement at the empty portion of the tin where pieces of it clearly went missing long before his arrival.

“I, uh, may have already had a slice last night,” Will admits. “And this morning, after breakfast.”

“I trust it was easier on your stomach than the gateau? That was, admittedly, far too rich perhaps to make a suitable breakfast,” Hannibal says, an apologetic frown on his face as though it is his fault Will hadn’t been able to keep it down. Truthfully, he is gratified to see

evidence of his mate's healthy and growing appetite and has to repress the pleased growl that wants to rumble low in his chest in approval.

"Yeah well, that was my idea, not yours," Will mumbles, an embarrassed flush blooming over his cheeks at the reminder of last week. "And yes, I kept it down fine." He did throw up this afternoon around lunchtime, however, and he's not optimistic enough to believe that'll be his last experience with weirdly-timed morning sickness.

"Hannibal, I need to tell you something." The Alpha looks at him curiously, intrigued by the serious tone.

"Will, are you cold? You seem to be shivering a bit."

Probably just nerves, Will thinks. "Maybe a little," he says, smiling weakly.

"Why don't we adjourn to the living room then? I'll get us a fire going."

"You don't have to do that," Will says, a token protest as he lets himself be swept out of the kitchen and seated at his own couch, secretly grateful for the few minutes of distraction as he watches Hannibal poke around in his fireplace and get a warm, comfortable blaze going. Staring into the hypnotic dance of flames is actually somewhat soothing for him. The dogs come over to lay down in their beds and bask in the warmth as well. Will envies the way they all manage to relax and go to sleep so quickly.

Hannibal comes to sit beside him, resting an arm on the back of the couch over Will's shoulders. "Now, what is it you wished to tell me?"

Will takes a steadying breath, grateful for the Alpha's close proximity as he soaks up the man's comforting scent. He turns in his seat slightly to better face him. "I saw my doctor yesterday," he says, voice quiet, gaze fixed on the other man's chin. "I'm…" He swallows, throat sticking. "I'm pregnant," he says for the first time out loud, voice trailing to such a low whisper that Hannibal might not have been able to hear it were he not sitting right beside him.

Because he's staring at his chin, he sees the way Hannibal's mouth parts open slightly in shock and his nostrils flare sharply, as if he is unconsciously trying to take in a deeper scent of Will in confirmation of this news.

In truth, Hannibal *is* somewhat surprised, not only by the fact that Will has taken the initiative so soon to learn of his condition, but also by the pure, visceral joy he feels at hearing those words fall from his Omega's lips, despite already knowing about it beforehand. He knows better than to express such elation immediately following the revelation, however, when it is apparent that Will's own feelings are still unclear on the matter.

He allows the corners of his mouth to turn upward just a bit all the same, knowing that it would easily be interpreted as a much safer—and not wholly inaccurate—display of instinctual Alpha pride in being able to successfully impregnate his Omega on the first try.

“That’s...” he clears his throat, honestly astounded to realize he has no script prepared for this moment. He is genuinely speechless. What a magnificent creature Will Graham is to render him so.

“Impressed with yourself, are you?” Will asks, noting the smile Hannibal can’t quite keep down and finding himself both amused and charmed by it now that the scariest part is over and he knows for certain that Hannibal isn’t going to freak out on him.

Hannibal ducks his head, seemingly embarrassed. “Have you already decided what you intend to do? The choice is, of course, entirely yours to make.” Naturally, this is utterly false. If Hannibal detects so much as a hint that the Omega is leaning towards the choice of terminating the pregnancy, he will take swift measures to ensure this is not allowed to take place—for his mate’s sake as much as the child’s, of course.

Will might not be happy about it at first, but he would learn to be thankful for the measures his Alpha had taken to ensure their family’s security over time. He has already prepared a comfortable cell in the bowels of his basement for just such a possible contingency, and feels a brief passing regret that this discussion could not have taken place in his own home should it be forced to proceed down that unpleasant route.

Will merely shakes his head. “I don’t know yet,” he says, unaware of the tightrope he’s walking or the danger lurking below should he fall off in the wrong direction. “It’s just so new to me still, I…I haven’t had time to consider it.”

“Of course,” says Hannibal, his expression the model of patience and perfect understanding. “Although…” He trails off deliberately and looks away, leaving the word to hang in the air between them, subtly transmuting his expression to one of uncertainty as if contemplating whether or not he should continue.

“What?” Will asks, unconsciously leaning in.

“Will, I do not mean to sway you one way or another,” he lies, “but if I may be completely open and honest with you for a moment?” Here, he takes Will’s hands into his own and decides to do just as he says, piercing the Omega’s gaze with eyes that for once are entirely sincere. “To be wholly truthful, my dear, I can think of no image more beautiful than that of you, growing and swelling with the life of our child inside of you.”

The stunned, widening blue eyes and exquisite flush of red creeping over the Omega’s skin at this declaration come in at a close second, however. *“O-oh! Um,”* Will stammers, temporarily speechless. He has difficulty gathering his words. “B-but you’re not…not worried that it’s too soon?” he asks, overwhelmed, thoughts racing. “You actually…want this?”

Hannibal takes another calculated risk then, cupping the Omega’s face with one hand and leaning in to scent deeply along the pulse point of his neck, awash with Will’s pheromones and still only the faintest trace of his pregnancy hormones. Will clutches at his shoulders tightly and purrs in response, quite unable to help himself.

Hannibal leans back then, fingers trailing through Will's curls and giving him the fondest of smiles. "I would like it very much," he answers simply. It is quite the understatement. He would destroy every other life on this entire spinning blue ball of ocean and earth until he, this Omega, and the fragile fetus growing inside him were all that remained standing, if that was what it took to have them both, and he would do so with the very same smile on his face.

"Well, I…I'll have to think about it," Will tells him.

"Of course," Hannibal says again, leaning back against the sofa and gently tugging the Omega closer, tucking Will's head to his shoulder so he can lean his own head against Will's, letting the fine dark hairs tickle against his nose as he sends out soothing pheromones of contentment and ease. "I'm sorry if what I said was…too much."

"No…no, it's good to know where you stand on this," Will says, relaxing against him. "It… helps." Ah. Not quite capitulating yet then, but not too far from being convinced either. It's close enough to suit Hannibal. For the moment.

*

The two of them spend the rest of the evening chatting quietly in front of the fireplace, staying up until well past midnight snuggled close to one another, occasionally breaking the conversation long enough to exchange soft, slow kisses or nuzzle at each other's necks. Will can't remember a time he's felt more blissful or at peace. It's such a relief to know that whatever else happens, Hannibal isn't going to break things off or run out on him. Rationally, he knows that would never have happened anyway, but he would be lying if he couldn't admit to himself that the fear had been preying on the back of his mind since yesterday.

It's nothing short of amazing for him to realize the depths to which Hannibal still wants him.

Hannibal stays the night, insistent that it is in no way an inconvenience to do so since he has no sessions tomorrow until mid-afternoon, and Will's mind reels at how *not* out of place he seems amidst his worn-out old bed sheets and mattress. The Alpha is apparently capable of looking like he belongs anywhere as long as he wishes to do so. Will wonders drowsily as he nestles in close if the man could teach him that particular gift, or if it's something that has to be passed down. The last fragmented thought he has before falling asleep is, *Maybe the baby will inherit it.*

*

Will blinks his eyes open slowly, not sure what time it is or what woke him up in the first place, only that it is still dark out so it must still be late. The fire has died down to embers, leaving only the light of the moon to cast shadows through the window.

It takes a moment for him to realize that Hannibal is still in bed but no longer directly beside him, that the warm weight on his abdomen is the man resting his head there, and the soft susurrus he can just barely make out if he listens carefully enough is him whispering.

"Ar jūs miega, mažylis? Ar girdi mane? Klausyti. Jūs turite man padėti. Turime įtikinti savo mama, kad mūsų šeima yra brangi ir verta kovoti. Man reikia jums šnabždesys jį savo ausies.

Užsiregistruoti ją švelniai jam savo svajonių. Ar galite tai padaryti už mane?”

Will has no idea what the man is saying, but something about the way he says it, one hand twisted loosely in Will’s shirt while he whispers earnestly at Will’s stomach, is enough to make the younger man’s breath still in his chest. Hannibal notices it, lifting his head to meet Will’s gaze.

“Did I wake you, *mylimasis?”* he asks, voice soft and concerned.

“Come here,” Will whispers to him urgently, tugging on his arms to try and pull him up. Hannibal obliges, gliding up his body until he’s holding himself up directly above Will.

It’s breathtaking to see the older man like this, hair mussed from sleep and falling into his eyes, which look so heartbreakingly vulnerable right now in a way that Will has never seen before, and suddenly just like that Will has his answer.

“Okay,” he says softly, reaching up to run his fingers through Hannibal’s sandy locks.

The Alpha looks down at him confusedly for a moment. Will watches as comprehension steadily dawns in his eyes. “Do you mean…?”

Will nods. “Let’s do this,” he says. “Let’s have a baby.”

Hannibal’s reaction is swift. He gathers Will up in his arms and kisses him ardently, then lays more kisses over Will’s face, his throat, every inch of his skin within reach.

There is no more sleep that night.

Chapter End Notes

In Lithuanian: *mylimasis* = beloved

And assuming I didn't completely butcher this in Google Translate, here is the full paragraph Hannibal was whispering: *"Are you awake, little one? Can you hear me? Listen. You must help me. We have to convince your mama that our family is precious and worth fighting for. I need you to whisper it in his ear. Sing it softly to him in his dreams. Can you do that for me?"*

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

> Was going to spend this weekend after my wedding focusing on my brownham fic and maybe the love-triangle-drama I'm working on, but I'm still so high on the hannigram feels after all the amazing responses I've gotten from you guys on my Beauty and the Beast AU that my fingers ended up typing another chapter of this one ahead of schedule. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is standing in the middle of a department store he has never bothered to go in before, looking over the selection of soft fabrics displayed on the shelf in front of him as he tries to decide which will be best suited to him as his new nesting blanket.

A few weeks ago he might have scoffed at the thought of ever needing one, thinking himself somehow above the needs of his own biology, or possibly just surprised at himself for requiring one now after spending the majority of his life perfectly content with the thought of spending the night in his bed alone. Doctor Farber has assured him that it is perfectly normal, however, for a newly pregnant Omega to start feeling restless and anxious at night without an Alpha at their side and had suggested this as a convenient alternative.

“They’re thick and heavy enough to simulate the warmth and comfort your body expects to receive from its Alpha. Naturally, of course, if you could have the father wear it for a bit to put his scent on it as well, that will help it work even better for you,” she had explained in that matter-of-fact way of hers, and Will had to bite his tongue to keep from pointing out tersely that he knew all that already; he had just never really expected those hormonal instincts to rise up in *him,* and certainly not so soon.

He feels embarrassed already at the thought of asking Hannibal to cozy up in it with him for awhile so he can get his scent, at least in part because he can imagine the unguardedly smug grin the man will be wearing as he says he will be only too happy to oblige. Really, the Alpha is almost unbearably arrogant at times, Will is starting to notice with an annoying sense of growing fondness. He can’t expect the Alpha to spend the night with him all the time, however, nor will he neglect his dogs by continually going to Hannibal’s either, so the blankets it is.

The call, when it comes, is an unexpected and wholly unwelcome interruption to his perusal of them. He pulls his phone out of his pocket and his stomach sinks when he sees the name flashing on the screen. *Of course it would be now,* he thinks as he slides the call button over and answers gruffly, “Graham speaking.”

"Will, I need you to come in. Where are you right now?" are Jack Crawford's all-too-predictable first words to him in almost two months.

"Out running errands," Will tells him simply. "I have other plans, you know. One thing about being suspended is it leaves me with time to actually make those now without having to drop them at a moment's notice," he adds, not bothering to mask his irritation with Jack's timing in the least.

"I'm sorry, Will. I wouldn't spring it on you like this if I didn't need you here <u>right</u> <u>now</u>," Jack answers. *"Consider yourself officially unsuspended as of right this second."*

Will steels himself to say that whatever grisly scene awaits him can wait a little longer, that he has the right to consider Jack's offer to come back in his own time and on his own terms, but before he can get the words out, Jack adds one final piece of information, *"It's Abel Gideon, Will. He escaped from the van that was transporting him to the courthouse and killed everyone else on board."*

Will's protests die in his throat, his mouth going dry. "Where?" he asks instead. Jack tells him —it's about thirty minutes outside of Baltimore and from where he is, but he doesn't tell Jack that. He says to give him about forty-five minutes, giving himself time to quickly make his purchase and call Hannibal to cancel their lunch date, and hangs up.

He picks out the softest blanket on the shelf, a dark forest green, and uncaring of the price brings it up to the front with him as his thumb flies over his contact list until it lands on Hannibal's number. He explains to him quickly what happened in the simplest, most neutral terms possible, mindful of the fact that he's in public and shouldn't bandy about words like "escaped" or "murdered" where anyone can hear him and it might cause a panic.

"Will," the Alpha says, his voice tense and stressed in that way only Will ever seems able to hear, *"it is not my place to say this perhaps, but I dislike the thought of you being at a scene that could potentially be dangerous."*

"Gideon's long since fled by now," Will reassures him. Still, he can't help but glance down at the blanket in his arm and be reminded of the fact that it's not just his own safety he has to worry about anymore. "I'll be careful though," he says.

"I know you will. It is Jack's unfortunate predilection for placing you in harmful situations with little regard for your safety that I am most concerned about," Hannibal says.

"I'll have a talk with him about setting some new, ah, conditions for my return to work," Will promises.

"Please do," Hannibal says, and Will is grateful he doesn't make some overbearing Alpha remark like 'I'll talk to him about it myself,' though he wonders if the man is perhaps just barely holding himself back from saying it. Either way, Will appreciates the fact that he's not trying to take the reins from him here.

"I'll be late most likely, but I'll still come out to see you tonight, okay?" He waits for Hannibal to reaffirm that he would like that very much before they both say their goodbyes.

The line moves forward and he pays, then heads out to his car and drops the blanket off unceremoniously in the backseat before he drives off and heads for the address Jack gave him.

*

The day is a brutal whirlwind of crime scenes as they find one murdered former psychiatrist of Gideon's after another, leaving Will with no time to have that conversation with Jack yet and sparking the Alpha to put all the remaining therapists including Alana under protective custody. Chilton is nowhere to be found when they knock on his door, however, and evidence suggests that Gideon may have him and Freddie Lounds both held hostage by now.

On a peculiar hunch, Will suggests they go to the observatory where the real Ripper left Miriam Lass' arm after Lounds' article came out. What better place for Gideon to try to communicate with the killer he was desperately trying to contact?

Jack insists that Will stay in the car when they storm in, an order that would normally bother the Omega if it weren't for the fact that he has every reason to comply and no intention of endangering his baby. He doesn't even have his gun on him, so crazy has the day been that he hasn't had time to retrieve it from home or ask Jack to issue him a temporary firearm.

Yet the danger finds him anyway, and it is somehow all he can do not to roll his eyes to the heavens in a gesture of *'Of fucking course'* when the passenger door of the SUV is suddenly yanked open and a scalpel is being held to his throat. The thought crosses his mind that the Ripper may even actually be a little impressed by the Alpha's gall in attacking an FBI agent in the midst of a pileup of federal vehicles and patrol cars all parked outside the front entrance for *his* arrest.

"Special Agent Graham," Gideon greets him delightedly as if the younger man had just stopped by for a lovely teatime chat. "I almost didn't recognize you! Who knew there was such a cute baby face under those glasses and mountain man scruff?" He reaches in to pinch Will's cheek and the Omega pulls back, practically snarling at the touch.

"Now, now," Gideon says, the scalpel flashing dangerously in his hand. "None of that. Feisty little thing, aren't you? You remind me a little of my wife." Something dark glints in the other man's gaze as he says this, and Will remembers that this man is not all ostentatious style and overblown manners. He should be afraid of what this man can do to him and his unborn child if provoked.

The danger passes as quickly as it comes, however, and with another smile Gideon says, "You know, you're actually just the man I was hoping to find. I have it on good authority you might be able to help me in a way no one else can. Something about the way you *see* guys like myself and the Ripper, am I right?"

"I've met a lot of people like you thinking I can help them," Will answers snidely, thinking of what Eldon Stammets had said to him in the hospital when he tried to kidnap Abigail.

"Excellent! Your life must be terribly fascinating then, now if you please," Gideon says, gesturing that Will should climb up front into the driver's seat. "No funny business. I can cut

you faster than anyone can come out to help should you decide to lay on that horn or try any other daring do." With that, he climbs into the backseat Will just vacated. "Drive. Doesn't really matter where, just away from here the sooner the better, please. Nice and easygoing. Oops, almost forgot!" he exclaims, reaching forward to quickly yank out the GPS and toss it out through the open window. "Alrighty then, let's go!"

Will drives without thinking about where he's going. It would probably be easy to slam on the brakes and somehow disable Gideon under the right conditions, but it's not a risk he's willing to take when a single slice across his throat or his abdomen could be deadly under the wrong ones.

He realizes as he sees the road signs pointing them toward Chandler Square that he's been unconsciously taking them to Hannibal's house, and he grimaces. He doesn't want to drag more danger literally right up to Hannibal's front door *again,* but he doesn't know what other choice he has. He's going to have a difficult time taking Gideon down on his own under the circumstances.

Gideon whistles lowly between his teeth. "This your place? You guys must get paid better than I thought."

"It's my psychiatrist's house," Will says through gritted teeth, hands clenching tightly on the wheel.

"Ooh, this should *really* be interesting then! I just *love* psychiatrists. I like where your head's at. We should pop in and say hi!"

Hannibal answers the door immediately, his relieved smile falling away as soon as he sees Gideon standing behind Will with a scalpel laid against the Omega's throat.

"Well, you're rather taller than I thought you'd be," Gideon says inanely. "Mind backing up nice and slow and letting us fine cold chaps come in from the wintry chill?"

After they step inside, he kicks the door shut behind him and asks, "Got anywhere we can all cozy up and chat?"

"My study is this way," Hannibal tells him, pointing. His study, where he sometimes keeps scalpels of his own to sharpen his drawing pencils and dozens of other heavy knickknacks that can be used as blunt weapons if need be. Will doesn't know if he more wants to implore the man not to do anything stupid or kiss him for being so brave and quick-thinking under pressure, but he thinks both feelings might be showing in his eyes where only Hannibal can see as he looks at him.

"Lead the way then, oh gracious host," Gideon says.

"Will, are you alright?" Hannibal asks as he guides them into the study, not bothering to hide the concern etched on his features.

Will wishes he would be more like his usual stoic self instead of choosing to be so open about his feelings now, not liking the way Gideon mutters, "Psychiatrist, huh?" behind him, though

he supposes it doesn't matter much. Gideon is already banking on the fact that Hannibal won't risk letting Will come to any harm. That, and he has no knowledge of the fact that Hannibal has any clue how to defend himself at all like Will does.

Hannibal leans back against his desk with both hands on the edge in a deliberately casual pose, one that Will immediately knows is all wrong and not how he would normally arrange himself even in a situation where he is simply trying to appear calm and laidback for effect. He gives nothing away in his own expression and hopes Gideon's inexperience with Hannibal in any form of social setting is enough to keep him from realizing something is off about it too.

"You have a lovely home, Doctor..."

"Lecter," Hannibal finishes for him, eyes darting as Gideon oh-so-casually runs the flat of the blade in his hand against Will's cheek. Will makes a point of keeping his expression calm and still and completely nonreactive. "Please don't do that," Hannibal says.

"It really bothers you, doesn't it? Are you two having an affair?" Gideon asks bluntly.

"Are you the man who thinks he's the Chesapeake Ripper?" Hannibal rebuts.

"Thinks he is?"

"You are not. The Chesapeake Ripper left a woman's arm in an observatory while you were still locked behind bars."

"Well, you have me at a disadvantage here," Gideon replies. "You seem to know an awful lot about me and my situation while I know next to nothing about you. You didn't answer my question."

"We are involved, though I would consider 'affair' to be a rather impolite term for it. If you are going to point that weapon at someone, might I suggest myself as the more suitable target? He is an unarmed Omega while I am a much physically stronger Alpha. Therefore I am the bigger threat to you at the moment."

"Somehow I don't think you're much of a threat as long as I've got your boyfriend standing here with me."

"That's one opinion," Hannibal says. "Are you sure it's not the wrong one?" Will sees it then somehow, in the brief flicker of eye contact between them, exactly what Hannibal intends to do and how he needs Will to react to get it right.

Will moves fast, leaning his head away from the blade which leaves his neck more exposed, but as he expects Gideon doesn't react quickly enough to take advantage of the fact before Will elbows him sharply in the ribs and dodges out of the way, allowing Hannibal to launch himself forward by the heels of his hands and charge the escaped convict before he can recover.

Will sucks in a sharp breath as Hannibal just barely catches Gideon's wrist in time and stops the scalpel from going into his eye, the two of them vying desperately for control of it. He looks around the room, trying to find something heavy that he can use to bash Gideon in the head with.

The two men fall wrestling to the ground, Hannibal on his back still trying to keep Gideon from stabbing him and turn the blade back on him. He notices Will moving out of the corner of his eye and shouts, "The phone in the kitchen, hurry!" He hooks his legs behind Gideon's knees and turns them both so he is now the one on top, still holding both of Gideon's arms at bay. *"Go now, Will!"* he barks when he sees the Omega hesitating, injecting enough Alpha command in his voice to spur Will into action, dashing out of the room instinctively in obedience.

He allows his expression to smooth out and his eyes to empty as Will's footsteps get further away. Gideon blinks up at him confusedly for a moment and then his eyes begin to widen in dawning comprehension. "Oh, I see," is all that he says. He giggles softly to himself to think that the profiler had inadvertently led him right to the Chesapeake Ripper after all. "Oopsies."

"Had circumstances been different, I might have considering letting you go and helping you in your cause," Hannibal states, barely out of breath as this Alpha is nowhere near as strong or skilled as Tobias Budge had been, allowing blind passion to guide his behavior with little to no forethought or strategy. The appearance of the fight being a struggle had been entirely for Will's benefit.

"However, you threatened the life of my mate and that of our unborn child," he continues. Gideon visibly pales, though the look in his eyes is now resigned. "And for that I'm afraid I cannot allow you to live."

With that, he flips them again so Gideon is once more above him, then deftly turns the blade still in the other man's hand and stabs him deeply in the neck with it, slicing right through the artery and dragging it along his throat, heedless of the blood that sprays out over his suit and hits him partially on the cheek. He then throws the man over to the side off of him and stands, assuming the pose and expression of a man both physically exhausted and emotionally shaken by what he has just done as he hears familiar footsteps thundering back down the hall towards him.

"They're on their way," Will says as he bursts back into the room, then stops, taking in the scene before him. "Is he...?"

Hannibal breathes out shakily, straightening his suit like it's a compulsive motion and then looking down at the blood that gets on his hands as if in dismay. "He left me with no choice," he says, swallowing. "He was about to get away from me, and I thought about what he might do if he caught up to you instead. I...reacted on instinct."

"Hannibal," Will says breathlessly, coming further into the room and pulling the Alpha into a tight hug, uncaring of the blood that gets on his clothes as well. Hannibal returns the hug just as tightly and Will leans up, kissing the man for all that he's worth. The scent of Alpha sweat and blood intermingles in the air, with the Alpha in his arms the clear and dominant winner. For the second time Hannibal Lecter has been forced to end another Alpha's life *for*

him, and Will feels terrified and relieved and consumed with desire for this Alpha to claim him once again *right here and now.*

The two of them pull away only as they hear sirens begin to sound in the distance, both of them panting and flushed, which tells Will at least that he isn't the only one affected by instinct, though it doesn't make him any less embarrassed by it.

Hannibal reaches up to wipe away stray blood that has gotten on Will's face and says, "Perhaps we should put off any celebrations of our survival until after we have been questioned." Will huffs out a breath of laughter and nods.

Later, after both of them have given their statements and changed clothes so the ones they were wearing can be bagged for processing, sitting together at the bottom of the stairs in Hannibal's foyer as cops continue to mill around and process the study, Will turns his head to Hannibal and says quietly, "You know, I didn't even think about the phone in the study, or the one in my damn pocket." He snorts, shaking his head in self-chagrin.

"I was hoping you wouldn't," Hannibal admits. Will looks up at him, and with a gentle smile Hannibal says, "To be honest, I just wanted you out of the room and as far from danger as possible until the police arrived."

"I *am* the police," Will reminds him, though he can't muster up as much annoyance as he wants to at the remark. He feels warmed knowing that the Alpha's instincts had been geared toward his safety and protection first and foremost. He sighs, resting his head against the other man's shoulder.

"Hannibal, Will," Jack says, apparently done overseeing the analysis of the scene as he comes back to talk to them again outside of the official interview process. "Doctor, I feel as though the bureau owes you its thanks and its apologies once again for everything you've had to go through lately."

"It's not me who needs the apology," Hannibal responds, his tone positively icy now that they are no longer speaking in an official capacity. "What were you thinking bringing Will into a hostile situation like that, Jack?"

"Pardon?" Jack asks, blinking down at the man in confusion.

"Hannibal, I...I didn't get a chance to tell him yet," Will says.

"Tell me what?" Jack asks, now more confused and slightly irritable to know he's been left in the dark about something.

Hannibal stands up, looming taller than normal from being on the higher step. Will stands up with him, wondering by the cold expression that hasn't left Hannibal's face if he's going to have to pacify him with a dose of his own pheromones soon to keep him from ripping Jack a new one as he so clearly wants to do. Part of Will wants to let it happen just to see it for himself.

“Will is pregnant, Jack,” Hannibal tells him without compunction. The other Alpha’s eyes look like they’re about to bug out of their skull at this pronouncement. “Now he tells me he’s willing to start profiling for you again.” Here, Hannibal visibly has to calm himself before he continues, “But I will admit I’m more than a little uncomfortable with the idea unless we get assurances from you that nothing like this will happen to him again.”

“I-of course,” Jack says hastily. “Had I known, I wouldn’t have...” He clears his throat suddenly. “Will, we’ll discuss in what...capacity you’ll be coming back at a later time,” he says. “And uhh...congratulations, you two.” With that, he beats a hasty retreat back to the cars outside. It isn’t long before the rest of the bureau agents and local PD follow, leaving Hannibal and Will alone in the house.

“I can help you clean up in there,” Will says, tilting his head toward the room where Abel Gideon bled out on the carpet.

Hannibal kisses him gently on the temple. “We’ll leave it for now,” he says. “I’ll also drive you to your own car so we can pick it up in the morning. For tonight, I simply want you close.”

Will smiles and leans up to kiss him again, this time more chastely. “That’s exactly what I want too,” he says softly and takes Hannibal’s hand, letting the Alpha lead him upstairs to bed.

Chapter End Notes

I adore Abel Gideon and would have loved to have opportunities to play with him more later, but there's just no way this version of Hannibal would have let him go after he threatened Will & baby. Just...no way.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

> Ack, I meant to have this out to you guys a few days ago, but I seriously underestimated how draining moving into a new house would be. On the bright side, bigger space! Two floors! More bathrooms! An actual washer and dryer! Semi-responsible adulthood! ~~Ok, it's still a rental house, but hush, let me have my moment here.~~ **does a happy victory adulthood dance**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the dogs begin barking, alerting him excitedly that someone is pulling up the drive, Will is lying on a faded old comforter on the floor, wearing only a ratty old tee with holes in it and frayed jean shorts as he fiddles with a small boat motor he's been meaning to fix up and resell to one of the parts shops in town for awhile now. He sits up as the dogs' barking gets louder and wipes sweat from his brow with the back of his hand, mindful not to get any grease on his face or in his hair, and does his best to wipe most of the grime from his hands onto his shirt just as the gentle rap on his door comes.

"So much for a quiet life in the country, eh guys?" he grouses good-naturedly to his furry companions as he stands. Never since he first moved out here has he received so many visitors so often as he has in the last few months. He isn't sure whether to feel more annoyed by that or glad of it. He supposes it will depend, in part, on whoever is standing on the other side of his door now.

"A-alana," he says, startled to see her as he opens the door. He shouldn't be, considering this is not the first time she's shown up at his house unannounced, but he would have thought after what happened the last time that she would not want to drop by like that again. Clearly he had assumed wrong.

"Hey Will," she says, smiling warmly. "I didn't catch you at a bad time, did I?" she asks, eyeing his sweaty stained clothes without judgment, merely curiosity.

"No, not at all. Just tooling around with a hobby of mine," he says. "Please come in." Does he normally come across so friendly and mannered when people come over to visit? Probably not. Hannibal must be rubbing off on him.

He puts his tools back and pushes the motor out of the way so the dogs won't mess with it. When he turns back, he sees her looking with a bemused smile at the empty space on his lure table where he used to keep his bottles of liquor before he decided to put them away under the sink, not liking the visible reminder of one vice he won't be able to indulge in again for the next several months.

He considers making some poor excuse about needing to clear the space so he can work there better, but would rather not call even more unnecessary attention to the fact that there's anything unusual about the arrangement. He also very carefully does not look at the nesting blanket sitting out on his bed, hoping that folded up it just looks like any other thick blanket he might have gotten out to fight off the lingering chill in the air. He can't name precisely why it feels like he shouldn't reveal his good news to her yet. He just has a feeling she won't take it as well as he might hope for.

"Chimney looks good," she says, eyeing the spot where he once hammered a gaping hole in it trying to find a noisy animal that didn't exist. He grimaces a little at the reminder but nods, agreeing that it does indeed look much better now that he's fixed it back to the way it was.

"So what brings you out here?" he asks, hoping to smoothly change the subject but not quite sure if he manages.

"It's been awhile since I've seen you other than briefly in passing in the hallways," she says. "I was hoping you'd let me fix that by taking you out to lunch." That's not the entire truth, he senses. There's something on her mind that she wants to address, and the invitation to lunch is both a means of keeping him from walking away from the conversation and a way of ensuring that it can't take a bad turn as they'll both be out in public.

The thought of what it is she might want to discuss causes a lump to form in his throat, but he finds himself nodding with a polite smile anyway, asking her to just give him a few minutes to get cleaned up. "There's tea still on the stove if you want to help yourself while I get ready," he tells her. "It's, uh, Rooibos."

"Not coffee?" she asks, that same bemused smile from earlier back on her face.

He hesitates a moment with his hand on the bathroom doorknob. "No, I'm trying to cut back," he answers finally. "Healthier living, you know," he adds with a self-deprecating smirk.

"That's good," she says, smile widening. "I'm glad to see you finally taking steps to look after yourself better."

He chokes on a wry laugh. "Only after some strong encouragement," he admits. "Apparently I rely too much on my chemical dependence to caffeine and not enough on my body's own natural regulations and sleep," he quotes. Hannibal had been rather insistent on that point, stating that if he wouldn't cut it out entirely, he should at the very least severely reduce his intake and replace his usual aggressive coffee regimen with a healthier and less-concentrated alternative for the baby's sake.

"Well, either way it's an improvement," she says, but something about her smile seems a little more strained now, possibly worried. He doesn't want to analyze it too closely and try to figure out what's going on there, all too certain he'll be finding out soon enough anyway, so he excuses himself and goes into the washroom, shutting the door behind him with a soft click.

The ride into town is fairly quiet, though not uncomfortably so, the two of them exchanging only snippets of idle chit-chat on the way. Being around her again, now minus the awkward embarrassing crush he had harbored for awhile, he's reminded of why he likes her. Alana is easy to talk to, soft-spoken but firm in her convictions and unwavering in her compassion and understanding of others.

"I spoke to Beverly yesterday," she says. "She mentioned you guys had a little slumber party a couple of weeks ago," she adds, tone bordering on mischievous.

"Did she now?" he asks archly. "I do seem to recall someone showing up at my house unannounced to guzzle down all my booze and hog the covers at night."

She titters a little at that. "Sounds like you two had fun."

"Beverly Katz is an awful influence and a terrible human being," he pronounces dryly. "And you can tell her I said that when you see her next. She'll take it as a compliment anyway."

"I'm sure you'll see her again before I do, now that Jack has you working cases again."

"Maybe," he answers, a little more subdued in his response now as he wonders if that's the reason she wants to talk. Alana has always been the one most strongly against him working with the BSU, so it stands to reason she wouldn't be too pleased to hear about him returning to it once more.

Lunch is at a little Vietnamese noodle shop that just opened near the center of town, which Alana tells him she's been dying to try since she heard it serves some of the best pho for miles around. Will isn't much of a picky eater, aside from the occasional craving or two, so he could care less where they go as long as nothing he actively dislikes is on the ingredients list for his dish.

"Just tell me you won't be adding sriracha to anything," he mutters as they walk in, recalling to mind Beverly and what he now considers to be the Sandwich Incident. "I can't stand the smell." It's a little embarrassing to think he's going to be one of *those* Omegas for even a short while, but to hell with it—he's pregnant, so his whims, his rules.

"Sure, I'll keep that in mind," she says with an amused smirk. "I'm not a big fan of spicy food myself anyway."

"I am generally, but not that stuff. It's vile."

"Whatever you say." They order at the counter. Alana requests a beer to go with her meal while Will just asks for water. That earns him another surprised lift of one eyebrow—usually when they've lunched together in the past and one of them decided to indulge a little, the other one followed suit. She doesn't say anything about it though, just chooses a table in the far corner for them and sits. Will feels grateful to her for trying to avoid where most of the customers are crowded around, at least until he remembers that she probably has another motive to her choice besides just Will's discomfort.

She waits until they are at least partway through their meal already before she finally begins to address what's been on her mind. "I didn't go down to the lab just to talk to Beverly yesterday," she quietly admits. "I went there to see Jack."

"I figured," he says, not looking up from his own bowl as he picks at it idly with his fork.

"Will, I can't stop you from going back into the field if that's what you really want," she says. "You already know how I feel about it. I won't waste my breath trying to convince you to reconsider. That's not what I want to talk to you about anyway." She pauses, taking a breath, and says, "Jack told me about what happened with Gideon at Hannibal's house."

"Ah," he says, at a loss for anything better to say, not sure what she's really getting at. "It was stupid taking him there, I know," Will admits, thinking maybe that's what bothers her, knowing that one of her oldest friends was put at risk when he has no prior training and no experience with defending himself aside from the incident with Budge. "I wasn't really thinking. I was panicked. I went there on...I don't know. Instinct, I guess."

"Instinct," she murmurs, that concerned look crossing over her features again. She pushes her bowl aside, done eating for the moment, and folds her arms gently over the table, leaning forward slightly in what Will can't help but think of as her 'therapist pose.' "What exactly is going on between you and Hannibal, Will?"

This...this is not what he was expecting. He should have been, he realizes. Come to think of it, the Alpha's claiming bite must have been visible plain as day under the tee he was wearing earlier at her arrival, yet she hadn't said a word at the time and so he hadn't thought anything of it. *Stupid, stupid Will.* How utterly careless of him.

"How much did Jack tell you?" he asks. He knows he's not winning any points with her by being evasive, but he wants to gauge her likely response before he tells her. It feels at the moment like he is sliding around on shifting sands where he had expected solid ground beneath his feet.

"It's more what he didn't tell me," she says, smiling grimly. "He seemed oddly uncomfortable talking about the two of you at all, except to casually *suggest* that it might be prudent I have this conversation with you."

Will grits his teeth at her admission, irritated all over again to find Jack butting his nose where it doesn't belong and urging Alana to do the same so he doesn't have to get his own hands dirty. "He sent you here," Will says, almost sneering, "Because he thinks Hannibal is being *unprofessional* towards me."

"I sent me here," she corrects. "We'd be having this discussion whether Jack mentioned the idea or not. And you tell me, Will, since I'm asking. Has he been unprofessional with you?"

"Oh, we're as far from professional as it gets," he tells her. It's like a switch has been flipped in his brain, as he suddenly finds himself caring less about dancing on eggshells around the issue, his annoyance with Jack spilling over to include her as well. "We're dating," he tells her flippantly. He does feel a *little* bad when she flinches at the near-callous way he says it,

but it's largely overridden by how fed up he is with everyone trying to interfere with his life all the time.

"That's exactly what I was afraid of," she says. "Will, you can't pretend you don't see why Jack and I would take issue with this. It's unethical! He's your psychiatrist."

"Never officially," he says, paraphrasing what Hannibal has said numerous times in the past to encourage Will to see him as more friend than therapist, then later as something even more than that.

"This is unbelievable," she says, her own eyes sparking with fresh anger underneath the worry, though amazingly it's still not directed at Will despite his tone with her. "Of all the people I might have expected something like this from, and after I recommended him to Jack no less..."

"He hasn't done anything wrong," Will insists. "Look, neither of us meant for it to happen, but it did. You can't just lay all the blame at Hannibal's feet. I'm a grown man capable of making my own damn decisions, not some dainty little teacup you all have to pass around ever so carefully like you're worried someone's going to drop me," he snaps. "At least Hannibal doesn't treat me that way." His eyes narrow at her. "Maybe that's what your problem really is. Feeling a little peeved, Doctor Bloom, knowing there's somebody else who wants me but doesn't consider me too *broken* to date?"

"No, of course not!" she says, looking a touch guilty at the reminder of her previous rejection, but more than that hurt by the suggestion. "That's not it at all," she says earnestly.

He sighs. "I know," he says, all of the ire draining from him just like that, leaving him feeling deflated and empty. "I just said the first ugly thing that popped into my head. Sorry I'm being an asshole right now. Mood swings," he grimaces.

"Mood swings?" she repeats, lips thinning as a look of consternation crosses over her features. She straightens back in her seat. "Is there something else you're not telling me?"

He bites his lip, wondering if it's too much to tell her all at once considering how she's reacted so far. It's useless to lie, however. She'll find out sooner or later anyway, and it would just upset her to know he tried to hide it from her. "I'm expecting," he tells her softly.

The look on her face is one of someone whose air has just been punched right out of their lungs. "You're *what? How?* I thought you were on suppressants."

"I went off them for a bit," he fibs, not wanting to get into it after what he just said about her not needing to worry about him.

"That wasn't his idea, was it?" she asks.

"What? No!" he says, laughing. "Why would it be?"

"I don't know," she says, now flushed with embarrassment. She waves her hand as if to swat away her words. "Of course it wouldn't be. I'm just so…overwhelmed right now, trying to

make sense of all this. Sorry."

Will waves her off, shrugging. "You haven't really said anything to apologize for. Don't worry about it."

She looks up at him, smiling almost uneasily. "I *am* worried. This isn't..." She cuts herself off, breathing out a heavy sigh. "It hardly matters what I say about it now. I can't undo what's already been done."

"I wouldn't let you even if you could," he tells her, smoothing a hand over the front of his shirt almost unconsciously.

Her eyes track the movement. "When are you due?"

"November," he tells her. "Hey, do me a favor, will you? Don't mention anything to Bev. She'd murder me if she found out I told anyone before her," he jests, trying to inject a little levity into the conversation to get rid of that serious expression on her face.

It works, partially, a tiny smile appearing on her lips as she says, "Whatever you wish, mommy-to-be."

Will makes a face that draws an amused snort from her. "My kid is not going to call me that."

"Not a traditionalist, huh?" she teases.

"Decidedly not," he affirms. He blinks. "You don't suppose Hannibal is, do you?"

Her only response is a raised eyebrow, as if to say, *What do you think?*

He groans. "You know what? He said something in Lithuanian once," he continues, blushing a little at bringing up something so private and intimate, even if only in part. "Couldn't understand a lick of it, but I swear I did hear 'mom' or something like that in there somewhere."

"Uh oh. Better nip that in the bud quick." He appreciates her playing along at keeping it lighthearted, given the way he can tell by the crinkle of her eyes at every mention of the Alpha that she's still upset with him, still perhaps a little uncomfortable in general with the idea of them having a child together.

"Oh, I intend to put my foot down before junior here comes along," he assures her. *I've got this. Don't worry about me,* he's trying to tell her without making it obvious, though he's not sure if the message is received. Most likely it is, but she'll choose to ignore it anyway, her own mind made up that the other Omega needs her support and protection whether he asks for it or not.

It's a little weird, honestly, but good to be talking this much about the baby with someone besides Hannibal or Doctor Farber. Suddenly it feels that much more real, which makes it just a little bit more nerve-wracking, but also more exciting and wonderful as well. Right now, at this moment, as they sit together at a cramped table in a noodle shop just two blocks away from one of the parts shops he frequents, a tiny life grows inside him, a bundle of cells

already starting to form and differentiate into other cells that will soon make up its blood and nerves and fingernails.

He never thought he would want something so much. Had certainly never considered the possibility that he would actually get to have this.

He chews on his lip to hold back the bright smile that wants to take over half his face, and her own smile softens into something more genuine, reaching across the table to cover his hands warmly with both of her own.

*

Hannibal is between sessions that afternoon when his phone buzzes with a text from Will.

'Just had lunch with Alana. She knows. Probably headed your way next so brace yourself.'

There is still time before his next appointment so he immediately responds. *'I take it from the tone of your message that this is not to be a congratulatory call?'*

'Nope. Mostly played it cool with me but I'm pretty sure she's pissed at you.'

'Ah. My thanks for the warning then. I shall endeavor to be extra charming when she arrives.'

'Can't even imagine what that means coming from you,' Will replies. *'Must be a sight to behold.'*

Hannibal is prevented from sending another response by a tentative knock at his door. Mrs. Tulles, precisely on time as most of his patients are, should they wish to be allowed back for another session. No one is ever foolish enough to be tardy twice, and only Franklyn was ever annoying enough to show up too early. Still, he finds himself having to smooth away a moue of displeasure on his face at being interrupted before he goes to answer the door.

He is not overly concerned with the content of Will's warning. Whatever Alana Bloom has to say to him, he is sure he can counter it easily with only a modestly demurring attitude and a few simple reassurances.

He has the opportunity to test his theory shortly after Mrs. Tulles leaves, as he finds Alana sitting on the couch in his waiting room with a surprising level of patience, considering the reason for her visit. Ever thoughtful and generally polite even when she is displeased with someone. It is one of the reasons he considers her one of his favorite acquaintances.

"Do you have any other appointments?" she asks.

"Not for another hour at least. Please, do come in."

He offers her a drink which she politely declines, remaining standing as she contemplates what she wants to say. "I've been given a lot to think about today," she begins cautiously, "and a long drive over in which to think about it."

“Yes, Will told me you might be coming,” he says, in a generous enough mood to spare her from needing to explain to him exactly what she is here for.

She looks up at him, a thread of steel behind her gaze even as she visibly tries to appear more tolerant and understanding. “What the hell were you thinking?” Ah, so she wants to rail against him then. Very well. He can play along with that.

He affects a look of mild, shame-faced embarrassment. “I can admit to myself as an Alpha that I may not have been really thinking at the time.”

“Clearly,” she says scathingly, voice picking up slightly in confidence and volume as she enters her stride.

“I hope you did not take this tone with Will,” he says, allowing the smallest layer of his person suit to peel away momentarily so she can see how genuinely displeased he would be if that were the case.

“I’m not pissed off at Will,” she rejoins. If she detects the implied threat, she doesn’t react to it, too caught up in her own ire to make note of his. What she does notice or recall later she will see as no more than the entirely natural reaction of a protective Alpha with a pregnant mate anyway.

“Of all the selfish, reckless, *irresponsible* acts you ever could have done,” she continues, and Hannibal finds it all so boring and predictable that he is almost ashamed of how effortlessly he tunes most of it out, though he is easily able to translate that for her benefit into shame because of the reprimand.

In truth while she carries on, he preoccupies himself mostly with a curious and lovely image in his mind’s eye of his mate dressed in dark traditional Greek robes, a crown of flowers and sharp bleeding thorns upon his head, draped decadently over a long divan. There are bones and shed snakeskins scattered haphazardly over the floor, and a tray near at hand loaded down with lush grapes and a pomegranate already split open with the seeds spilling out, this Will’s fingers already sticky with its juices. Hannibal wonders if she will finish soon and leave him with enough time before his last appointment to begin drafting a rough sketch.

“I’m shocked at you, Hannibal,” she says, her tone slowing and evening out enough to let him know she’s winding down. “You of all people should have known better. This isn’t good for him. It’ll foster an unhealthy dependence if it hasn’t already—”

“Alana,” he interjects here, sensing his opportunity, “are you honestly suggesting that I break things off with Will now and effectively abandon the mother of my child?”

Her eyes widen like saucers at the way her words have been seemingly interpreted. “I...n-no! No, of course not!” she exclaims, face flushed. “I just...you have to realize what a horrible imbalance of power this is. He’s your *patient,* for god’s sake! At the very least, you could have referred him beforehand...”

“That would imply some level of forethought which, as we have already established, I unfortunately possessed rather little of at the time,” he says, repeating the lie from earlier.

“What happened between Will and I was a moment of unexpected passion, ill-advised perhaps, but one I would not trade for anything, considering the world of happiness it has brought both of us since,” he adds, allowing himself a quick genuine smile which has the added benefit of making her marginally more sympathetic to him, at least subconsciously.

“And as our sessions were never conducted in any official capacity either, it is not my place to refer him to anyone.” He raises a gentle hand when she seems about to speak again and suggests, “Perhaps, as you are so invested in the idea of him seeking therapy with someone else, you would be willing to consider offering your own services to him?” He is loath to part with even that small level of control, but if it will put her more at ease and reduce any chances of suspicions against him, then so be it.

She crosses her arms and glances away from him, considering it. “I don’t think he’d be very keen on accepting that offer, to be honest.”

“He would not,” Hannibal agrees. “If he would be willing to accept therapy from anyone, however, he would most certainly prefer it be with you over a stranger.”

She nods. “I’ll think about it then.” She sucks in a breath and looks back at him. “I’m not going to apologize,” she announces. “You deserved all that and more, but...” she trails off with a shrug. “It’s not my call. I can’t police the two of you, and if you guys are really as happy as you say, then I’m glad for you both. Well maybe not *glad* at the moment, but you know what I mean.”

“I do,” he replies, ducking his head diffidently. “And I assure you that I appreciate the sentiment, even considering current circumstances.”

She nods once neutrally, and with a glance at her watch says, “I should go, just in case your patient gets here a little early.”

He nods in return, acquiescent and grateful, and walks with her to the door. He returns to his desk after she leaves and checks his own watch. Just enough time to start that sketch. With a pleased smile, he takes up a blank page and a pencil, and begins.

Chapter End Notes

Seriously, I don't know how pregnant people do it. I wouldn't be able to give up my own coffee addiction. Will has more strength of character here than I do. :/

~~I had to mention Bev here too even though she's not in this chapter because Will throwing shade at her in true BFF fashion is my everything ok, shhh.~~ Katz & Dogs brotp for life!

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will comes into the lab the next day as they're wrapping up final reports on Gideon's murders and escape.

"Hey, just in time to help us out with the boring bits!" Zeller crows as he walks in.

"My hero," Price declares with a maidenly hand over his chest. "Actually, most of my work is done already," he says. Behind him, Zeller makes a face and repeats the words silently in an exaggerated, mocking fashion. "Now, if you'd gotten here half an hour ago, that would have been great."

"Sorry," Will chuckles. "I'll help out with what I can though. Where's Bev?"

"Back here," she calls out. Will hears the metallic scrape of one of the morgue cold chambers being slid shut in the back. A moment later she steps into view, pulling off her latex gloves and tossing them into a biohazard disposal container. "What are you doing here, you dork? Coming through," she says, shouldering between both of her boyfriends so she can come up to Will and pull him into a loose, undemanding hug. "Not that I'm not happy to see you, but we've got this one handled already. I'm sure Jack doesn't want you coming back just to be a paper pusher."

"Actually, paper pushing may be exactly what I spend most of my time doing from now on," Will says with just the smallest frown of distaste. "Jack's in his office right now calling *'my Alpha'* so the three of us can sit down and discuss the terms of my reinstatement," he adds with an even bigger scowl.

"Whaaaat?" says Zee. "That is so messed up. Did Jack wake up this morning thinking we were back in the fifties or something?" Jimmy crosses his arms over his chest, frowning.

"Yeah, that…really doesn't sound like Jack," says Beverly, hands on her hips. "Want me to go beat him up? Just 'cause he's my boss doesn't mean I won't do it."

"I don't think that'll be necessary, but I'll let you know if I change my mind," Will says wryly, in better cheer now knowing that he has his friends' support. "I don't like it, but it is kind of funny seeing Jack get so worked up about not offending Hannibal. I think he's a little intimidated after the way Hannibal spoke to him the other day."

"Ooh, now I'd pay to see that," Jimmy pipes up.

"What, Jack getting intimidated or Doctor Lecter getting all up in somebody's grill?" asks Zee.

"Both," says Jimmy.

“I still don’t get it,” Beverly says. “Why would Jack even want to get your boyfriend involved in your return to work? I mean obviously he’s not gonna ask him for another psych eval now.”

“Well…” Will says cautiously, pulling up one of the rolling stools to the countertop behind him so he can sit. Beverly furrows her brows and pulls up the other one beside him so she can sit facing him, and Jimmy and Zee both edge closer too while remaining standing, as though Will is about to impart some state secret to all of them. “To be honest, it may have less to do with the actual reinstatement and more to do with determining the best timeframe for my maternity leave.”

For a moment Beverly and Zee both just stare at him, blinking, the words taking a moment to register. Zee recovers first, blurting, “Lecter knocked you up?” while Jimmy just nods sagely.

“I knew it as soon as you walked in,” the man says.

“You did not,” Zeller retorts.

“You’ve got that glow going for you,” Jimmy continues, blithely ignoring the other Beta. “My great-grandmother was a midwife. I can tell these things.”

“You’re making that up,” Zeller insists.

“You’re having a kid?” Beverly asks Will, utterly ignoring the other two arguing behind her. “Seriously? Damn, that was fast.”

Biting his lip against a smile but not quite managing to hide his mirth as his shoulders shrug upwards in a silent laugh anyway, Will nods.

He is wholly unprepared for the way she launches herself at him, rolling forward on her stool, and wraps her arms around him in a tight, almost crushing hug.

“You *have* to let me throw your baby shower!” she crows gleefully with her arms still wrapped around him. Will sputters, while behind her back Jimmy and Zee both give him looks of sympathy mixed with a bit of trepidation of their own.

“I’m not having a baby shower.”

Beverly pulls away just enough to look at him as though he just said he hates puppies, mock-glaring at him in both astonishment and disbelief. “Oh, yes, you are,” she says matter-of-factly.

“Bev, you know I don’t do well at parties,” Will tries. “What makes you think I’d be able to host one?”

“You’re not hosting it, I am! I just said so,” she scoffs. “And relax, I’m not gonna invite the whole FBI. Just a few people you can stand to look at for a couple of hours at a time, like Doctor Bloom, Jimmy and Zee here…”

The collective groan behind her makes her crane her head back just enough to look at her boyfriends and say, “Hey, no grumbling or I’m putting you both on after-party cleanup duty!”

“You’re going to make us do that anyway!” Zee exclaims.

“That’s *why* we’re grumbling,” points out Jimmy.

“Fine,” she says. “Keep complaining then. I can always add to the list. Maybe you boys would like to help with setup too,” she adds significantly. “Hanging up the streamers… putting together party favors…”

She lets the rest of the statement hang, smiling triumphantly at the telling silence behind her.

“There’s no talking you out of this, is there?” Will asks.

“Not a chance,” she says. “So where are you registered?” At the utterly blank look he gives her, she clucks her tongue and says, “Time to get on that, baby mama. Need me to come over and help you pick out stuff online?”

“No, and don’t call me that.” He regrets the words as soon as they leave his mouth, realizing his mistake as her lips curl up into a devious smile at the revealed weakness.

“Got a problem with the ole ‘m’ word there, Mister Graham?” she asks far too innocently.

“Is it so much to ask for if I want my kid to call me ‘dad’?” Will asks. “I get enough daily reminders of how I’m not like other men.”

“You say that like it matters now,” Brian pipes up, “but I bet you’ll be just as happy whether it’s ‘mama’ or ‘dada’ coming out of that little munchkin’s mouth as soon as they’re old enough to call you anything.”

“You sound like Hannibal,” Will grumbles.

“You’ll start getting plenty more ‘daily reminders’ soon enough anyway, mama,” Katz adds, punctuating her statement by puffing out her cheeks and curving her hands outward in an exaggerated arc over her own abdomen.

“Are you saying I’m going to get *fat?”* Will asks in a scandalized tone.

“We’ll have to put signs out in the hall. ‘Caution: Whale Crossing Ahead,’ how does that one sound?” Just as Will makes as though to grab for her, she suddenly shoves her feet onto the floor and rolls herself backwards, cackling merrily when Will merely follows in pursuit on his own stool when he could just as easily have stood up.

“Mercy! *Mercy!”* Beverly cries out laughing once he catches up to her. “You wouldn’t hit a girl, would you? If you do, I hit back!”

“You wouldn’t hit a pregnant Omega,” he retorts. “Beverly Katz, you are the *worst friend ever!”* he declares, grabbing her by both shoulders and shaking her in mock violence. “How could you say something like that to my face, huh?”

“The truth hurts, *mama.* You’re gonna balloon out like a pufferfish!” she predicts gleefully.

He gasps loudly as though outraged, and the two of them continue to tussle playfully from the comfort of their seats.

“What the hell is going on in here?” Jack asks in a booming voice from the open doorway, Doctor Lecter following closely behind a moment later.

Will feels an embarrassed flush begin to creep along his cheeks at the thought of Hannibal catching him like this, but it dissipates almost immediately as Katz wags an accusing finger in his face and tells them, “He started it!”

“I did not, you liar!” he responds with an incredulous grin.

“Clearly, we’re helping Will practice at parenthood, sir,” Jimmy joins in without missing a beat.

“Well, did you bother telling him he’s rehearsing for the wrong role?” Jack asks just a touch peevishly. Turning to stare down Beverly and Will, he gestures toward Jimmy and Zee and says, “Usually it’s these two I have to remind not to use the lab furniture as playground equipment.”

“That was *one* time!” protests Zee.

Hannibal in the meantime has walked further into the room, coming to stand beside Will and Beverly. “And here I was, worried that your return to work might prove too stressful on you and the baby,” he murmurs quietly enough for only them to hear.

“Worry no more, Doctor Lecter,” Beverly says warmly, wrapping an arm around Will’s shoulders. “Both bun and oven here are safe with me looking out for them.” Will pinches her on the arm for that remark while Hannibal looks down at them both with an amused crinkle at the corner of his eyes.

“If you two are ready,” Jack says, “we can talk in my office.”

Turning back to Will, Hannibal offers his hand and asks, “Shall we?”

Will accepts the help getting up with a soft smile, and Jack immediately exits the room without waiting for them, apparently impatient to get back to his office.

“Doctor Lecter, wait, real quick!” Beverly says just as they turn to follow. Both of them turn back to look at her, and with a devious smile she asks, “Where are you guys registering?”

Will is about to remind her that they have no idea yet, but Hannibal answers before he can. “I have a few tasteful department stores in mind whose online catalogs I have been browsing. I’ll let you know once we come to a decision.”

Beverly grins while Will merely gapes at the man next to him. “Knew I could count on you to be prepared at least,” she says. “Send me the link once you’ve got it set up.” She turns back

to Will with a wicked glint in her eye and adds, “I’ll be sure to include it on the shower e-vite.”

Will clutches Hannibal’s hand tightly. “This is the part where you get offended she would suggest something like that and insist we’re going to buy everything we need for ourselves, right?” he asks hopefully.

“We will certainly end up buying most of it,” Hannibal agrees. “However, it would be remiss of us to ignore tradition and not allow our friends to take part in this joyous occasion by bestowing us with gifts and good wishes.”

Will groans and grumbles something under his breath about ‘stupid traditions’ and where Hannibal can stuff them. With a faint smirk, Hannibal nods in farewell to the others and guides Will out into the hall.

When they are alone, Hannibal remarks, “I was surprised by how comfortable you seemed with Miss Katz’s close proximity to you. I know that normally you don’t like to be touched.”

“Not feeling jealous, are you?” Will asks cheekily.

“No. Should I be?” Hannibal replies, amusement lifting the corners of his lips once more.

Will rolls his eyes. “She’s like the annoying sister I never had.”

Hannibal merely continues to smirk knowingly, opening the door for Will and smoothing his features back into a more neutral expression once they enter Jack’s office.

*

“You want to spend *how much* on a crib?” Will chokes out, aghast, later on that evening after dinner as he scrolls through the wishlist Hannibal already has open on his tablet.

“It’s part of a very fine set,” Hannibal says, coming to stand behind the sofa so he can look over Will’s shoulder at the device in his hand.

Will makes a disgusted noise. “That’s even worse. You do realize our baby is not going to care if they slept in an *‘elegant sleigh crib with gorgeous relief carvings and sophisticated details in the woodwork,’”* he quotes mockingly from the catalog description. “This is a lot of money to be spending on something they’re just gonna drool all over and not remember later.”

“Quality craftsmanship is important, my dear. I want only the best for our child.”

The Omega cranes his neck back to look up at him through narrowed eyes. “Don’t think I can’t tell what you’re trying to pull over on me with that line,” he responds dryly. Hannibal puts a hand over his chest as if to say, *Me? Pull one over on you? Perish the thought.* Will snorts and looks back at the tablet in his hand. “This thing is ridiculous, Hannibal! I might as well just build one myself at this kind of price range.”

“I was not aware you were skilled at woodworking in addition to your other hobbies.”

Will's cheeks color a bit, caught in his bluff. "I could learn," he mutters obstinately.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs gently, coming around now to sit beside the empath and let his arm rest across the back of the sofa behind Will. "There is no cause for fear or worry where price concerned. Money is no obstacle. You may have noticed," he adds with a touch of sardonic humor, gesturing around the room as a whole with only a slight tilt of his head, "I am already used to a fairly comfortable lifestyle."

"Fairly comfortable," Will repeats under his breath, practically sneering. He shifts a little in his seat and tries not to worry about getting scuff marks on the couch underneath him that probably cost more than his car.

Hannibal laughs lightly, having heard the remark. "Do you harbor a resentment for the rich, Will?"

"Don't we all?" Will answers, earning himself a delighted grin from the Alpha.

"I am fortunate to have been born into a rather wealthy family, and to have been brought up with a good head for business investments and similar ventures by my father in my younger years, and later by my uncle as well."

"Great, I hope you're not about to tell me you're some lost Lithuanian prince and I'm about to give birth to royalty before the end of the year."

"Count, actually," Hannibal corrects gently.

Will turns to him with wide eyes, searching his face for some sign that he meant it in jest. "Seriously?" he asks in a tone that borders on high-pitched. "I was only kidding."

"It is merely a title with no significant weight in this day and age. I hold the deed to my family estate and little else back in my homeland. It has no bearing on my life as it is now."

"Jesus," Will says. "Any other surprises I should know about?"

Hannibal's eyes glimmer mysteriously. "You must allow me some of my secrets for now, *mylimasis*. It would spoil the fun to give them all away too soon."

Will blushes anew at the endearment, the sudden prickle of unease at the back of his neck discounted and dismissed as lingering unfamiliarity with this level of intimacy as Hannibal's arm shifts from the couch to around his shoulders to draw him closer, easily forgotten as the Alpha nuzzles into the crook of his neck and leaves a trail of soft kisses up the line of his throat.

Will lets out a shaky laugh that sounds suspiciously close to a purr, gently pushing the Alpha away before things can get too far. "Hey, you're the one who wanted to get this done, remember?" he asks a little breathlessly, forcing himself to look back down at the tablet in his lap.

"It can wait. I can think of a few other matters we could attend to now in the bedroom."

“Nice try,” Will says. “But I’d rather get this all over with now so I don’t have to look at it again.”

Hannibal snorts softly. “God forbid you might find yourself enjoying it.”

“I’ve never seen the point in this kind of thing,” Will contends. “And while we’re back on the subject, *Count Lecter,”* he says, lifting up the tablet again to show him the picture of the expensive crib once more, “being obscenely well-off is great for you and all, but how do you expect the lowly common rabble that makes up most of the people I know to afford something like this?”

“That’s why we’ll be making two lists,” Hannibal states simply. “One to which you can add any items you may like that you would consider too extravagant or unseemly to ask a friend for,” he says with a mischievous gleam in his eye. “The other you can add whatever is more affordable to use as our gift registry. I will purchase everything on the first list and whatever remains on the second after the shower is concluded.”

“Oh, will you, Alpha, *pretty please?”* Will drawls archly. “After all, I’m just a poor little Omega with no means of my own, utterly dependent on the kindness of strangers.”

“Apologies,” Hannibal says, tipping his head forward demurely yet unable to keep the smile off his face. “It was not my intention to imply you were incapable of buying any of it yourself. I simply enjoy being able to provide for you and our child as much as I can.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know how much you get off on it,” Will says, casually swiping his finger over the screen to continue browsing as one might flip through the pages of a magazine. Hannibal chuckles and Will has to bite his lip to hold back a smile, inordinately pleased by how often lately he has been able to pull a laugh or a smile from the normally sedate man.

“You know, I assumed all I’d be doing was trim off the fat from what you already picked,” he adds dryly. “I don’t know what makes you think I’d want to add any—*aww,”* he coos, interrupting himself not a moment later. “Will you look at this? It’s so cute.”

“It certainly is,” Hannibal says without looking away from his Omega. When he does finally glance down, he has to hold back another quiet laugh. Of course, leave it to Will to find the only puppy-themed mobile in the store’s online offerings. “You should include it on the registry then.”

Will looks up again, eyes narrowed once more as if he suspects he’s being made fun of. Seeing that Hannibal means it, he smiles and leans in to kiss the other man chastely on the mouth.

He checks off the box to add the mobile to the list, then swipes to the next page.

Chapter End Notes

Aww, look at this story! It's turned into such a cute little fic full of sassy play-fights and pregnancy fluff. It would be *such a shame* to...

...ruin it by bringing more horror elements, angst, and dark themes back into the mix in upcoming chapters, wouldn't it? ;)

Just how familiar do you think Will is with *A Streetcar Named Desire* in this verse? Do you think he dies a little inside every time someone complains that he ought to be more like the quintessentially Omegan southern belle Blanche DuBois, cringing internally at how spectacularly that person obviously missed the point of the entire play? I do. ;)

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

I may have gotten carried away and also started writing the next chapter already, so you might get yet another update sooner than usual in about a week or so maybe. *Yay!!* ^_^

Warning ahead for ALL THE FEELS THIS CHAPTER.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Their first real argument takes place a few months in, just as Will's baby bump finally begins to show, when Hannibal casually asks whether Will has a space in mind where he would like his lure-making table set up in the study or if he would prefer a private office of his own in one of the spare bedrooms upstairs.

Will scoffs at first that he doesn't need another table at Hannibal's house, that the one at his place is fine, until his brain catches up with the real implication behind the words and the Omega realizes what Hannibal actually means.

To say that he does not *appreciate* the assumption being made here would be an understatement, and the Alpha seems nothing if not completely taken aback by his mate's vehement reluctance to cooperate.

"Will, this back and forth between Baltimore and Wolf Trap is fine for us now," Hannibal tells him with an eminent patience that sets Will's teeth to grinding. "But you cannot realistically expect it to continue once the baby is born."

"Don't give me that bullshit like I'm the one being unreasonable here. You can't just talk to me about getting rid of my *home* like it's nothing, like it's just a given that I'm going to roll over and let you take it from me!"

"I am not trying to take anything, *mielasis.* I mean to give us a home where all three of us can live as a family together. If it was callous of me to assume that home would be here rather than Wolf Trap, then I apologize. I thought it the obvious choice given its considerably larger size more suited for a family of three or more and the shorter commute to a fitting school."

"Do you honestly think I can't *hear* the way you're twisting your words right now so it still sounds like I'm the bad guy here?"

Hannibal narrows his eyes at that, a displeased frown marring his normally placid expression. "I was not aware either of us was behaving as the 'bad guy' in this situation, Will."

Will crosses his arms over his chest, a note of finality in his voice as he says, "I'm not selling my house, Hannibal."

“You expect me to move to Wolf Trap then—”

“I don’t expect you to do anything,” Will interrupts, hands balling into fists as his fingers curl tightly into his own shirtsleeves. “If I wanted you to move in, I would *ask.”* He glances away at the look of hurt that crosses briefly over the Alpha’s face, feeling guilty for causing it but determined not to be swayed.

“Will, I have apologized for that,” the older man says, unbuttoning his jacket so he can sit. “I did not think you would be so strongly against this.”

“You just don’t get it, do you?” Will rubs a tired hand over his face, biting his lip against the words that want to spill out. He doesn’t want to hurt this man, *he doesn’t,* but at the same time, resentment he didn’t even know he was holding back bubbles up to the surface, eager for the chance to boil over and finally let off some steam.

“You know, I used to think you were different from other Alphas,” he says quietly, watching carefully as the other man’s shoulders tense. “But you aren’t, are you? You’re just the same, used to getting your way and overruling everyone else like their opinions don’t matter. Only you learned how to spin it politely so no one would notice.”

“Will, I…” Hannibal trails off, having no defense for himself that the other would believe and realizing he is for once loathe to come up with a convincing lie.

“I should go home,” Will says, just as soft-spoken as before. “Spend some time with my dogs. I haven’t hung out with them much lately.” He looks as if he is about to say more, reconsiders it with a small shake of his head and adds only, “I’ll see myself out.”

Hannibal listens to the sound of the front door clicking softly shut, the shaky purr of Will’s car engine turning and the crunch of tires against smooth pavement until they grow distant and then impossible to hear altogether. He steeples his fingers together and lowers his face to his hands, sighing deeply through his nose as he considers what he should do now to make up for this grave misstep.

*

Will gets home and tries not to think too much about what happened, choosing to distract himself with a hike through the woods with his dogs until it becomes almost too dark to see and he has to turn back.

When he gets inside, he reaches reflexively for the space on his table where his bottles of liquor used to be months and months ago, fingers curling around empty air instead. The aborted motion makes him stop mid-step, recoiling his hand in horror from the spot as if the mere memory of those bottles there had burned him. The hand comes up to bury itself in his hair and tug harshly instead while the other one rubs protectively over the barely-there bump of his abdomen.

“Christ,” he mutters under his breath. This is the first time in a surprisingly long while he’s been tempted to drown his own sorrows, and to think that he might have almost done it *without even thinking…*

Without further ado he stomps into his kitchen and yanks open the cabinet under the sink. He pulls out every last bottle and pours them all down the drain one by one, dropping each one into the garbage can with a satisfying clink of glass against glass until all but the most expensive bottle he owns are gone.

The last one remaining hasn't even had its seal broken yet, Will having decided he should save it for the rare *good* occasion in which he had something he wanted to celebrate rather than forget. He knows from the label alone that it had cost more than he would ever spend on himself even at his most self-indulgent, and he hadn't. Hannibal had given it to him for Christmas. It even still has the same elegant red bow tied around its neck.

"Bit of an uncreative choice, I realize," the Alpha had said as he handed it to Will right at the start of their session. "But one I imagined you would appreciate nonetheless." He had waved off the Omega's awkward embarrassment at not having gotten him anything, stating that Will's company alone was gift enough. In retrospect, Will really should have picked up on the man's feelings for him a lot sooner than he had.

Will squeezes his eyes shut as his fingers clench tightly around the bottle's neck. With a heavy sigh, he puts it back under the cabinet behind an assortment of cleaning supplies and other odds and ends, out of sight so it can be out of mind once again.

After that he refills the dogs' bowls and makes himself a cup of warm milk instead. When he's ready to call it a night, he curls up under the weighted blanket, breathing deeply of Hannibal's scent still clinging to its folds, and tries to ignore the prickling sensation of tears sticking to his eyelashes.

*

They don't see each other for several days afterwards, until Will's next appointment with Doctor Farber. If the Beta notices how quiet and self-conscious they both seem around each other, she's tactful enough not to say anything. For that alone, Will thinks it's more likely she hasn't noticed. The woman is fairly likable, but blunt.

Although they've barely spoken, Hannibal walks Will to his car. The two of them stand there beside Will's driver side door and merely look at one another.

Finally, when it seems Hannibal is about to try to say something at last, Will closes the distance between them to wrap his arms around the Alpha's shoulders and pull him into a hug.

"I'm sorry," he says, quiet yet heartfelt, and does nothing to suppress the soft purr that rumbles in his chest when the Alpha pets gently through his curls.

"That is my line, dear heart," the older man murmurs against Will's ear, causing the Omega to quietly laugh. "I am truly sorry as well." Hannibal pulls back only far enough to take in the Omega's beautiful features. "I have missed you, Will."

Will leans in to brush a light kiss over the other's lips, pulling back when Hannibal brushes his thumb over a few tears that have managed to escape. "Sorry," he says again, swiping at

his own eyes, prepared to cite some excuse about hormones before the other man swallows it, sweeping Will closer again with an arm around his waist and giving him another longer, needier kiss.

The Alpha sighs against his lips and says, “I am reluctant to part from you again so soon after this.”

Will smiles, feeling relief and contentment being in his mate’s arms once more. “Follow me back to the house then,” he says. Giggling when the Alpha seems reluctant to let go of him even for that, Will eventually convinces the man to return to his own car and follow him back out to Wolf Trap.

He washes his hands after petting every dog in turn, planning to get started on preparing lunch for them both. He turns to ask what Hannibal would like and realizes that the man has not followed him into the kitchen, finding him instead still standing in the living room, eyeing the bed taking up most of the space there.

“You have never told me why it is that you sleep out here.” Will swallows lightly and Hannibal, seeing it, ducks his head apologetically and says, “Nor do you need to now, if it causes you stress. The last thing I want is to hurt you again.”

“You’re not,” Will reassures him. Making a ‘come here’ gesture that means Hannibal should follow, he turns to head towards the stairs.

He stops outside one of three doors on the second floor. The other two lead to the upstairs bathroom and storage closet respectively, Hannibal remembers from the time he snooped through Will’s house alone. He knows what is behind this door as well, not saying as much in part because the Omega might not take it well to learn Hannibal went through his private sanctuary unattended, and partly because saying anything at this moment would spoil the delicate mood between them.

Will hesitates with his hand on the doorknob briefly enough that another may not have noticed it at all, before he carefully turns it and finally steps inside. The smell of dust and disuse enters Hannibal’s nostrils for the second time since he was up here as he follows closely behind.

Will stands stoically inside the room for the first time in...longer than he wants to think about, if he’s being honest with himself. Obviously it could use a cleaning, though it’s not as bad as one might have guessed it should be considering how long it’s been neglected. Stacked amongst the more standard pieces of bedroom furniture are various old and unused medical supplies. An old television against the wall. A cluster of photographs of Will, his dad, and the dogs on the bedside table, all of them angled to be seen from the large, adjustable hospital-grade bed in the center of it all.

The room tells its own story readily enough, but standing there beside Hannibal, Will feels compelled enough to say it out loud anyway. “I brought my dad here to live with me after they put him on hospice care.” His throat clicks as he swallows. “It was actually really nice, having him around. He wasn’t bedridden the whole time, just...just right there at the end. He

had a bad heart." Will's lips pull into an awkward twist of a smile. "I always thought there was such an irony in that, considering what sort of man he was."

Hannibal tilts his head as he takes those words in. "You never reclaimed the room, even after all this time, because it is here you feel his presence the most."

"No," Will corrects, shaking his head. "It's here I feel his *absence* the most."

Will steps closer to the bed, trailing his hand lightly over the frame and snorting suddenly when he pulls it back only to find dust and dog hair on it. "Goddammit," he chuckles, wiping his hand on his pants. He turns to face Hannibal again, still laughing, and says, "You know I used to come home from work and at least *half* of the dogs would be in bed with him, no matter how many times I told him the dander wasn't good for him and he shouldn't let them."

Hannibal smiles at him in return. "You and your father shared a love for animals."

"Uh yeah, I guess that's pretty obvious at this point," Will laughs some more. He leans in to stage whisper conspiratorially, *"Do you want to hear a secret?"*

Hannibal leans in even closer. "Very much so."

"Amelia and Marie," Will says, referring to the border collie and the chihuahua mix downstairs, "they're the only ones that were originally mine to begin with. Well, Winston now too obviously, but I mean back then."

The surprise must be showing on Hannibal's face because Will nods, smirk widening. "That's right. Once upon a time, Will Graham wasn't 'crazy dog guy' to all his students behind his back. He was just 'crazy guy' who happened to have a totally appropriate, socially acceptable *two* of them," he says, holding up the same number of fingers and wiggling them playfully. "The rest moved in when Dad did. Charlie, the oldest, he'd been around since I was a kid, but the others I didn't know yet. I think they were strays he picked up slowly over the years after I moved up north." He rubs idly at the back of his neck. "Trying to fill the empty nest, I suppose," he adds with a weaker smile.

"You picked up his good habits," Hannibal muses. "It was quite a responsibility to take on all at once and completely on your own, especially after he was gone."

Will shrugs awkwardly, shoulders hunched. "What else was I supposed to do, give them all up for adoption?" he asks, voice growing fainter as if he can hardly bare to say such a thing aloud.

"Most people would have," Hannibal points out. Again, Will shrugs, having no real response for that. Hannibal already knows he's not much like other people.

Hannibal lets his gaze sweep across the room, lingering over nothing particular as he says, "This house holds a lot of memories for you."

"It does. Ones good and bad," Will agrees with a nod.

“Will, do you truly wish to continue living here?” The unexpected question snaps Will’s attention back to the immediate present. It sounds genuinely curious and not like a lead, so Will stops to seriously consider it.

“I...I don’t know. I’m not sure I’d go as far as to say that honestly,” he admits.

“But this place, it is important to you?” Will nods.

Hannibal lowers himself to his knees, pausing a moment to brush a kiss over the swell under Will’s shirt and taking one of Will’s hands in his own like a supplicant. Will is reminded of the last time Hannibal did this on their first ‘date,’ though the Omega is standing this time instead of sitting.

“I don’t want you to sell your house, Will,” Hannibal says. “After you left, I thought about something you had said once about the lights from outside reminding you of a boat at sea, making you feel safe, and I realized how unforgivable it was of me to have even made the suggestion.” Will looks as if he’s about to protest the point, but Hannibal squeezes his hand gently, indicating that he isn’t finished yet. “I want us to continue making memories here. I want you to have somewhere to go when you are overwhelmed and need to get away to feel grounded again, a place where you can run free through the woods with the dogs until your lungs burn and you feel alive again. A place where you can take our young to the water and teach them how to fish.”

Will takes a shuddering breath, feeling embarrassingly close to tears again, and shakes his head. “You were right though. This house, it really isn’t where I see us raising a family together.”

Hannibal smirks up at him then, making Will feel as though he’s missed the punchline to a joke. “Will, you misunderstand. I am a pushy Alpha used to having his way, remember?” Will blushes at the reminder of his own words from a few days ago. “I still have every hope of convincing you to move in with me in Baltimore, but I believe a suitable compromise would be for you to keep this place as well, as somewhere we can go as a family to get away, or somewhere you can go to get away from me when I’m being too annoying and overbearing.”

“Oh, well if that’s what you meant,” Will laughs. “I don’t see how that’s any different from now though. I’ll still have to come out here every day to take care of the dogs.”

Hannibal shifts to sit up slightly and reaches into his pocket, and Will feels his breath stutter and stop in his throat for one dizzying second because *this,* with Hannibal down on one knee and one hand still holding Will’s own, it looks like...it looks like...

He exhales shakily as Hannibal pulls out his phone, unsure whether to classify what he’s feeling right now as relief or something else. “Do you know the two large empty lots on either side of my house?” Hannibal asks as he scrolls through the phone in search of something in particular. “I own them both. Have for many years now, in fact. I didn’t want any close nosy neighbors,” he confesses with a wink. He hands Will the phone.

The page is open on an email exchange between Hannibal and a local contractor negotiating on a quote to fence off the whole property, all three lots, and build a comfortable heated kennel roughly the size of Will's living room on the leftmost one.

"I haven't signed anything yet. I told him I would need to discuss it with my mate first," Hannibal says proudly as Will keeps reading, mouth agape. "I realize it's still not as much space as they're used to running around in, but it should be fairly comfortable even for seven, and there are also dog parks nearby we could take them to when—"

"I'm convinced," Will interrupts. He swallows, nodding rapidly as he hands the phone back to Hannibal. "I'm convinced. You've convinced me. I'll move in with you."

"My Will," Hannibal says, smile widening. Will ducks his head almost shyly, amazed by how much lighter and happier he feels again, how easily Hannibal makes him feel this way.

"Come on," he says, tugging on Hannibal's hand and gesturing towards the door to indicate that they should head back downstairs.

"Ah, just a moment, *mylimasis,"* Hannibal says, still kneeling. "There is one more memory I would like to add to the others in this room."

Will quirks an eyebrow at that statement, unsure how to fathom its meaning. He thinks about the empty space on the bed where his father once lay dying, Hannibal kneeling in front of him, the life he and Hannibal have created growing within him. *Death and life. Birth and rebirth. Bad memories and good ones.*

Hannibal reaches into his pocket again, and this time his hand emerges with a small, black velvet box. Will freezes in place, feeling his breath catch in his throat again, his heart hammering in his chest like a rabbit being chased by a wolf.

The box is opened to reveal a simple, elegant rose gold band, adorned only with an uneven vein of amber running through it like a jagged cut running through skin. Part of Will wonders if he ran his finger over it if it would feel like a puckered scar, or like it should still be molten and bleeding.

"Will Graham, you explained it best when you described me the other day, though you were far kinder in your words than I'm going to be. I am a very selfish and very greedy man." Will laughs once, nervously, and Hannibal allows himself a small amused smirk before continuing, "More than you yet realize. When I say that I love you, that I want you, I am not speaking in the abstract or referring to only parts of you. I want every part of you, Will, mind, body, and soul. And I want you to have every part of me. I want you to know me, see me. I want to give you my home, my name, all that I have and all that I am." He takes the ring out of the box and holds it up, grasping Will's left hand with his own. "Will you let me?"

Will finds enough of his voice to whisper one word, the only answer he can possibly give after a speech like that one.

"Yes."

Chapter End Notes

Did you know that in *none* of my outlines or previous planning was Hannibal ever going to propose to Will?

I didn't even know he was going to do it *until I already started writing it.* True story.

Me: *is typing away* "But wait, that's...that's not what I had plan--Hannibal, *what are you doing??"*

Hannibal: *turns to look at me through the screen* (can characters do that when they're technically only words? well.) "You were taking far too long, dear writer. I am merely progressing things to the point where they should be."

Me: *dies*

So...I hope you guys are happy with this development. xD

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

> Here we are, swiftly approaching the moment of truth even if we're not quite there *yet.* The opening passage of this chapter is one I've been eager to share with you all for awhile. This is *the* passage that sparked in my brain and inspired me to begin writing a story around it over a year ago now. Gah, I hope I'm not overhyping it by telling you that. I'm just so excited! xD
>
> It also occurs to me now that I *may* have fibbed to you a bit if I ever told you this fic would in no way have any elements of the later seasons going into it. To be fair, I did provide at least one clue about it earlier on. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is a forest.

That in itself is not strange. Often Will's dreams begin this way, surrounded on all sides by the familiar sights and smells of the spruces and cedars surrounding his house in Wolf Trap, the crunch of pine needles underfoot. This is not the same forest Will usually walks, however.

Here, the shadows are long and deep. The scent that carries in the stagnant air is that of rust and decay. Of *blood.* The branches are sleek curves and sharp angles. Not branches at all, in fact, upon closer inspection. *Antlers.*

Will steps in closer only to jerk sharply back, cradling his cheek against the stinging pinprick of pain blossoming from the center. He sees then what he hadn't noticed before, a fat droplet of his own blood shining black in the moonlight, hanging suspended for a moment before it drips from the business end of a fishing hook tied onto one of the antler-branches by a thin, nearly invisible line like the world's most macabre Christmas tree ornament.

Caught you hook, line, and sinker, the branches whisper as the wind suddenly picks up and rustles through them, the tinkling of metal interspersed within the words like laughter. Will looks around and realizes it's not just one hook, but *hundreds* of them dangling from every branch on every tree.

And further along the path, though he had thought he was alone, he notices someone else. His heart burns in his throat at the sight. A chubby-cheeked toddler wearing just a diaper, golden curls spilling around a cherubic face. Without even having to think about it, Will starts heading in that direction.

The little one laughs delightedly and starts running the other way, thinking it's a game. Panic seizes Will. This place of shadows and sharp metal ends and whispers in the dark is no place for a child. *"No, no, wait, come back!"* he shouts, frantic and terrified as he runs to catch up.

"No!" he cries out again, reaching impotently with one hand from too far away as the child bends to pick up a feathered lure from off the ground.

To his shock the babe turns around, gleaming metal hook in hand, and gives him a beatific smile at once bubbling with innocence and something else he would never expect to see on a child's face.

Will stops, frozen, as the child grows and changes before his very eyes, into a tall, lanky, sprawling creature that wears the night around it like a cloak, antlers thicker and sharper than the ones surrounding them on all sides and still growing out of the being's head as it towers above even the trees and the stars themselves.

Will cranes his neck back to look up at the entity's face, overwhelmed by the staggering amount of love and awe he feels for this strange creature he's inadvertently created. It stands tall and proud and stares down at its now-tiny mother with warm eyes, a deep maroon swirled with implacable shades of stormy blue-grey.

Will startles awake, tangled in the sheets, hair plastered to his forehead in a cold sweat. In the irreality of that liminal space between dream and full wakefulness, he forgets where he is, sees only the crisscross of shadows from tree branches growing longer and deeper along the walls, hears his name groaned by a rumbling voice beside him. A shape darker than anything else in the room sits up and looms closer, reaching out as if to touch him, and Will thrashes, panicked, trying to get away.

"Will. Darling, shhh, it's alright. It's only me." Will feels himself relaxing even before the bedside lamp flickers on, forcing him to squeeze his eyes shut for a moment against the unexpected brightness. The voice is a comfort, affectionate and familiar, though also rougher and more accented than usual from sleep.

He opens his eyes again finally at the feeling of fingers raking comfortingly through his damp curls, combing them back from his forehead. Hannibal's smile as their gazes meet is soft and tired.

Will lets his eyes flicker briefly over to the alarm clock on the bedside table and groans. He supposes he should be grateful this is the first time in a long while his dreams have woken him in the middle of the night, but mostly he's just annoyed with himself for waking Hannibal as well. He mumbles an apology, but Hannibal merely shakes his head and dismisses it.

"You are far more important to me than sleep." Will snorts disbelievingly but doesn't say anything. "Besides, it's Sunday," Hannibal continues. "We can always sleep in a little later."

"But what about that...thing you wanted to go to?" asks Will, allowing himself to slump back against the pillows. It's probably a good thing he's tired, or else he would be frowning at himself right now for even bringing that up. Not that Hannibal would ever be likely to forget or let him weasel out of it anyway.

"The gallery showing is not until later in the evening, plenty of time to laze about and do nothing all day," Hannibal says as he props himself on one elbow, especially indulgent

knowing that Will could hardly care less for their evening's plans.

"Mm, sounds heavenly. The doing nothing part, I mean," Will says. He brings his hand up to rest lightly over the no longer hideable swell underneath his shirt. Ever since he has been getting bigger—*ballooning out,* as Bev is all too fond of saying—his feet have taken to hurting under all the added weight whenever he stands or walks and his back is killing him all the time. To say nothing of the fact that he can practically fall asleep at the drop of a hat now and feels like he needs a nap after every class or once every other hour spent in the lab. Ah, the joys of pregnant life.

"Damn, we're not the only ones awake anymore," he mutters, sounding entirely too fond to be truly annoyed as he feels soft kicking starting up again beneath his hand.

Hannibal's fingers slide over the bump, interlacing with Will's own fingers so he can feel their baby's kicks as well. "She's quite the active one, isn't she?" he says rhetorically with a proud smile.

"Not even born yet and already showing the signs of becoming a holy terror," Will grumbles. *"She?"* he asks after a beat.

"Or he," Hannibal concedes. "Or something else altogether." Far be it from them to decide their child's sex or gender as something set in stone when the child may very well tell them otherwise one day in the future. They have both opted to leave it as a surprise because it simply doesn't *matter.* "I have a feeling about this, however," Hannibal admits with a conspiratorial wink. "Call it a father's intuition."

"I'm going to remind you of this conversation later if it turns out you're wrong. With great relish."

"You do take far too much enjoyment in pointing out my mistakes."

"Only because you give me far too few opportunities."

"I would hardly consider that to be a flaw." Whatever Will might have said in reply to keep their playful banter going is interrupted by a loud gurgle from his stomach.

"Sounds like you could do with a midnight snack," Hannibal offers, already rising out of bed.

"I feel like a bottomless pit of never-ending hunger," Will admits with a long-suffering sigh. "The other day I was looking at autopsy photos and all I could think about was how much they were making me want chopped hamburger."

Will can't see Hannibal's eyes in the dim lighting, the Alpha standing far enough back from the lamp that it throws stark shadows over his face, but he can catch the barest glimmer of a sharp smile. It's always oddly comforting to know that the other can share in Will's morbid sense of humor and isn't put off by it.

"Is there anything in particular you are craving, *mielasis?"*

“Uhm, could you make some more of those bacon-wrapped mushrooms like we had the other day?” Over the past several months, Will has learned to stop feeling embarrassed or worried he’s asking for too much when Hannibal offers to cook for him, no matter the hour or the extravagance of the dish. The other man would happily create a five-course meal from scratch if Will asked it of him, four o’clock in the morning or no.

“I certainly can.” Will gets out of bed then and starts tugging out the sheets. They’ll need to be washed now that he’s sweated through them. Now that *is* embarrassing. It’s been a bit since he’s suffered from night sweats, and this is the first time it’s happened here since he moved in to stay.

A gentle hand on his shoulder stops him from continuing. “Leave that to me,” Hannibal says. “Hand me your shirt and shorts as well. I would recommend a long shower to soothe any lingering nerves. You’re still a bit tense, my darling.”

Will brushes a grateful kiss over the corner of his lips and does as told, first tugging off the damp shirt over his head before moving on to the boxers. It’s hard to stifle a giggle at the fact that Hannibal has to help him out of them since he can’t really bend down or wriggle out of them without wobbling too much.

He can’t feel too embarrassed about his sweaty naked body either, not with the satisfied smile Hannibal wears as his eyes sweep over his form or the way his hands trail first over his large, rounded abdomen before slowly beginning to drift to other areas as well.

“Unless you’re planning on joining me in the shower,” Will drawls, “best quit your teasing now while you’re ahead.”

Hannibal lifts a considering eyebrow, as if contemplating whether he should do just that, and *of course* that’s the moment Will’s tummy decides to gurgle unhappily at them again.

Hannibal chuckles softly. “It would seem I have a more pressing duty elsewhere,” he says, withdrawing.

“Traitor,” Will grumbles, staring mutinously down at his own belly.

“Go shower,” Hannibal tells him with a fond smirk. “It should be ready by the time you come out.”

“Ooh, make spicy peanut sauce too, please!” Will adds before ducking into the bathroom. Both of Hannibal’s eyebrows raise this time at the unusual combination, though it’s not the first time that his mate’s peculiar cravings have provided him with some unique and rather creative culinary challenges of late.

By the time Will steps out again, relaxed and refreshed and wearing only a fluffy oversized robe stretched across his belly, the sheets have already been replaced with clean ones and Hannibal is sitting propped against the headboard, still wearing only the pajama bottoms he woke up in and nothing to cover his furred chest, a tray of bacon-wrapped mushrooms and Thai peanut sauce on the bed beside him as he pats invitingly for Will to rejoin him.

“God, you look like something out of every Omega’s fantasy, you know that?” Will asks. “Sometimes I worry you’re exactly that, just an elaborate hallucination my brain cooked up.”

“I feel much the same about you,” Hannibal says as the Omega climbs into bed and lets himself be pulled into the Alpha’s embrace, back to chest so he can relax against the other man while they eat. “Nevertheless, I can assure you that we are both quite real.”

Will moans happily around the first morsel in his mouth and lick stray drips of sauce from his fingers. “You have to try it like this, come on,” he says when Hannibal selects a mushroom for himself without dipping it first.

“Mm, I have an idea already of how that will taste from the way their scents intermingle.” Nonetheless, he obediently dips a portion of it into the sauce and raises it to his lips. Will laughs at the mildly pinched look that steals across the man’s features, openly expressing his distaste.

“Rude boy,” Hannibal says, nipping playfully at Will’s ear in retaliation and inciting more helpless giggles in doing so.

“Oh, and making that face at your food isn’t? Besides, you like my rudeness,” Will counters.

“On you, it is charming,” Hannibal agrees.

By the time they finish eating, Will feels sated enough and full—*for now*—to go back to sleep tucked against the Alpha’s warm chest.

*

Morning and afternoon are spent exactly as promised, the two of them lounging together without even bothering to change, distracting each other from quiet reading or other activities on occasion to make conversation and share lazy kisses. Will feels it like a slow pull in his gut, the overwhelming *domesticity* of it all.

He catches himself looking at the glimmering band on his finger more times in a day than he cares to admit to anyone, always with the same tiny bit of wonder and disbelief that this is *his.* This is his life now, coming home to his *fiancé* and spending lazy Sundays together, taking breaks from essay-grading to watch Lamaze videos online and practice breathing exercises, going to art showings because Hannibal wants to and making plans to one day drag Hannibal out to the stream after the baby’s born because *he* wants to. If anyone had told him less than a year ago that he would end up here someday, and so soon at that, he would have assumed they were crazier than he was.

Here in the peaceful quiet of daytime, the nightmare that woke him in the early hours of the morning fades into little more than nebulous impressions and hazy recollections at best. It becomes difficult to imagine why he would have anything to fear. He remembers it having something to do with the baby, but the finer details are vague and elusive to him now. He doesn’t bring it up with Hannibal; the man would likely point out that it’s a natural anxiety for any new parent to fixate on and try to reassure him, which Will doesn’t need. He isn’t worried, there’s just...something *niggling* about it that he can’t quite seem to recall, leaving

him with an unsettled feeling like he left the house and can't remember if he left one of the stove burners on or not.

"We should start getting ready soon," Hannibal tells him, distracting him from his musings. Will glances up at the clock on the mantelpiece and sees that he's right.

"Into the lions' den," he sighs. Hannibal chuckles, mussing his hair fondly and pulling his head closer to brush a kiss over his temple.

"I know you are not fond of social gatherings, and I appreciate you agreeing to come out with me tonight. I promise it will not be as bad as you are thinking. My acquaintances are mostly well-behaved."

"Only mostly, huh?" Will asks.

"Francine Komeda may be in attendance this evening," Hannibal explains with a near-mischievous glint in his eye. "But don't worry, if she is, I think you will like her."

Will doesn't say that he doubts that, that he can't see himself liking any of the unctuous rich that enjoy rubbing elbows with each other at this kind of thing. He doesn't want to offend the man. This is Hannibal's crowd, after all, and for the first time it hits him fully just what he's getting himself into by agreeing to marry him.

What if he goes to this thing tonight and finds that he can't stand it, can't stand the people there? What if they find *him* intolerable, too rough around the edges and too weird, or take one look at him and sniff out his impoverished background, decide based on that alone that he must be some kind of gold digger only in it for Hannibal's money and status? It's bad enough some of them have almost certainly already been whispering words like "shotgun wedding" to each other since the news came out, despite the fact that he and Hannibal have decided the wedding should wait until after the baby is born and things have settled down.

It bothers him because as much as he doesn't want to care what these people think of him, he can't help himself. This is the crowd Hannibal throws his fancy dinner parties for, dinner parties which he will be expected to attend and even co-host in the future as his husband, so the last thing he wants is to disappoint the Alpha or be an embarrassment to him. *Good god almighty though,* he wonders, what has he gotten himself into?

He must be frowning or showing his thoughts on his face somehow, because Hannibal walks back over to him, tucking a strand of hair back behind his ear and trailing his fingers softly over his face. "We could always cancel and stay here, or I could go alone if you wish."

"Dear lord, no," Will huffs. "Then I'll either be the unbearable mate that keeps a leash on you and won't let you go to the things you like, or the stuck-up Omega who thinks he's too good for his mate's friends."

"Do you truly believe that or are you worried that is what others will think of you?" Hannibal asks. "You needn't be concerned. I am not particularly attached to my acquaintances at these functions, and will be only too happy to cull any from our social circle who show even the slightest disrespect to my mate and my family, I can assure you." The way he says it, so

earnest and so *possessive,* sends strange dark yet delighted shivers down Will's spine, and he leans up to meet Hannibal's lips with his own. They part again with a wet prickling sound, and Will tells him he'll be upstairs to change in a few.

Hannibal says nothing as he does up his cufflinks when Will enters their bedroom a few minutes later with a plastic package of Oreos and a jar of peanut butter in hand. As pleased as he is by his pregnant mate's increased appetite, and by his growing appreciation for protein in particular, he would be even happier if he could cut all processed junk food from Will's diet altogether. Attempting that again would be redundant and inadvisable, however.

Will had come home once (after a particularly trying day at work, the Alpha had been curtly informed later) to find the abominable cookies he'd left in the refrigerator in the garbage bin instead. Hannibal had come home later that evening to find *all* of the remaining contents of the freezer and fridge left out to spoil in the open bin outside, and a serenely smiling Omega waiting on the front porch who calmly stated that since *his Alpha* would be indisposed with grocery shopping and not providing dinner that night, he would be going to McDonald's instead.

Hannibal, grateful at least that his *preferred* cuts of meat were all safely stored away in the basement freezer below, had taken the hint and made sure to pick up an identical package of cookies with the rest of the groceries when he went to the store that evening.

Will seems to be remembering the incident as well. As he scoops up a glob of peanut butter onto his first cookie and bites into it, their eyes meet, and a lightly embarrassed flush creeps over the Omega's cheeks even as his lips pull up into an almost catty smirk. Hannibal gives an exaggerated sigh simply so he can see that smile widen.

He goes to the closet and pulls out Will's tux for the evening, now able to return a victorious smirk of his own as Will groans at the sight of it. He waits until Will has set his snack aside and dusted the crumbs from his fingers before helping to put it on.

"I still can't believe you paid to get me fitted into an outfit I can never wear again," Will grumbles as he is helped into the oversized, billowing shirt and tucks it into the custom-fitted, elastic-lined slacks.

"Never say never," Hannibal says, holding open the jacket for Will to slip on. "It will come in handy to already have formal maternity wear for next time, I think."

"Next time?" Will sputters, making a good impression of choking on his own spit. "Excuse you, this one hasn't even popped out yet and you're already making plans to put me through this *again?"* He narrows his eyes at the other man. "You know there's a saying about counting your chickens before they've hatched, Doctor Lecter."

"Would it not be preferable for him or her to have at least one sibling, as opposed to growing up an only child?"

"I grew up an only child and I turned out...okay, never mind, maybe I see your point." Will shakes his head wryly. "Did you have siblings?" he asks.

Though he is not looking when he asks, Will feels an almost imperceptible change in the man behind him, a shift in the room like the temperature has dropped by a couple of degrees. He turns around slowly and looks up. The other man has not said a word, the expression on his face carefully guarded and almost blank. Almost, but not quite.

“Hannibal...” Will starts to say very softly.

Hannibal turns to slip on his own jacket. “Come, we’ll be late if we don’t hurry,” he says. Will knows that isn’t true, if anything they’ll be early if they leave the house now, but he doesn’t say anything. He can’t, not now, with Hannibal closed off to him so swift and sudden.

*

The whole affair is quieter and more subdued than Will expected, if no less crowded. The art on the walls is modern, bright splashes of paint and asymmetrical shapes that Will might even find interesting if he could in any way focus on it.

Although they had ridden together in silence on the way here, Hannibal now walks around the room with Will on his arm, leaning in close to say a few words about each piece as they pass, introducing and showing off his mate with a proud smile to anyone who approaches to speak with them or offer their congratulations. Will notices a few envious looks directed at one or both of them at various points throughout the night, but finds it all bounces easily off of him for once instead of getting under his skin. He is far too focused on paying attention to the other man, observing him quietly and wondering how it is that nobody else can tell how troubled the Alpha is underneath all the false smiles.

Finally Will can’t take it anymore and asks the man to find them something to drink that isn’t champagne just so he can be alone to his thoughts for a few minutes.

He waits in front of a painting that has no picture on it, the whole canvas instead only bright, brilliant splashes of crimson and other shades of red layered over each other in violent, impassioned strokes. A woman comes to stand beside him and look at the painting as well, a brunette Beta in a bold red and black dress cut in fashionable sharp angles that make it look almost as though one’s hand would come away bleeding if they tried to touch her, her lipstick the same shade of red as the dress and nearly matching the canvas itself in front of them.

“There’s something compelling but almost sort of awful to look at about it, isn’t there?” she asks without glancing away from the painting. Her voice has a rich and feminine timbre with a pleasant huskiness to it.

“I don’t know,” Will says while keeping his eyes forward as well. “It’s forceful and frightening to look at, yes, but all the more beautiful for it as well.”

The Beta tilts her head and leans at an angle slightly to look at him then, and Will mirrors her almost unconsciously, aware but not bothering to quash it the way he normally tries to with all his other empathic tics. “You must be Doctor Lecter’s mate. Will Graham, right?” she asks.

“You have me at a disadvantage here,” he says with an awkward smile, eyes straying up no farther than her left cheekbone.

“I saw your engagement announcement in the *Sun,”* she says. Right, Will almost would have forgotten about that thing, if not for the way Bev had teased him about it and papered the bulletin board and various spots around the lab with copies of it for days afterward until Jack barked at her to take them all down.

“Margot,” the woman says then, smoothly transferring her champagne glass from her right hand to her left and offering it for him to shake. “Verger.”

“What’s the heiress to the Verger Meat Packing Company doing talking to me?” he asks, grasping her hand firmly but briefly and letting go as soon as it’s polite. “How do you know Hannibal?”

“I’m a former patient of his,” she admits. “Probably not supposed to say something like that while out in polite society, but,” she shrugs, “fuck it.” Will snorts. He likes her, he decides, sharp angles and piercing green eyes and all.

“You know who I am, so you probably know all about my family’s public carnage,” she says.

“Vaguely,” he says. “I keep away from tabloid rumors mostly. There was something a few years back about your brother being in an accident, I think?” he asks, wondering if he isn’t overstepping his bounds to mention it even though she brought it up in the first place.

“Something like that,” she says, and there’s a lurking shadow to her words that makes it difficult not to be drawn in. “He’s still alive and well though.”

“You don’t sound happy about that,” he says, and they’re veering well beyond what should be said in polite society now, enough that he catches himself glancing around for a moment to make sure no one else is listening. “Something to do with your private carnage?” he ventures a guess.

Something behind her gaze sharpens, not maliciously so, but warily. “I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours,” she says. Then her gaze softens again, and she glances down at his abdomen. “When are you due?” she asks.

Will tells her, and he notices the way her free hand almost reaches, fingers curling as if she wants to touch and just barely stops herself. He’s grateful to her for that; most people try to do it without asking, as if Will’s belly were public property now that there’s a whole human being growing inside it, and Will *hates* that, being no more fond of contact now than he was before.

He almost tells her that she can, if she wants, but the words remain stuck in his throat. Not because he doesn’t want her to, but because he knows suddenly without asking that she would refuse, no matter how badly she wants to, and he keeps his silence because the words that now want to come out instead are, *What happened to you, Margot? Who hurt you? What did they do?* He’s shocked by the overwhelmingly Omegan response that rises up in him suddenly and makes him want to comfort her and make sure she’s okay.

“I should go,” she says, breaking the silence between them with a more fragile smile than what she was wearing a minute ago. “It was nice to meet you, Will.”

“You too, Margot,” he says to her back as she leaves. Hannibal returns a few moments later with a glass of water in hand.

“I apologize for taking so long, my dear. The catering staff here are appallingly unhelpful.” Will is just grateful that carefully guarded distance in his eyes is finally gone. It seems the distraction and few minutes apart did them both some good. Well, it did *Hannibal* some good. Will’s not sure what it did for him just yet.

“You just missed an old patient of yours,” Will tells him. “Margot Verger.”

The statement gives Hannibal pause, a very brief one but long enough for Will to realize that as her former psychiatrist, Hannibal would almost certainly be in the know about whatever ‘private carnage’ still haunts her now, and he bites his lip to keep himself from asking.

“I was not aware the Vergers were back in town,” Hannibal states simply. After Will finishes drinking from his glass, he asks, “Would you like to go home now?”

“Please,” Will says, handing the glass back to the first server carrying a tray who happens by.

*

The drive back is just as quiet as the first for a bit, until about halfway there Hannibal finally says, “You asked me a question earlier this evening that I was not prepared for, though truthfully it is something I should have told you a long time ago. I have been meaning to for some time, in fact, since we discussed your father’s passing. It seemed only fair, but the timing has never felt right.”

Will looks over and observes the man quietly. Hannibal keeps his eyes on the road, the only light coming in from the streetlamps outside as they pass and leaving the interior of the car mostly dark, giving the man’s profile the appearance of a bas-relief carved out from shadow.

“I had a sister once,” Hannibal admits to him finally. “Her name was Mischa.”

“Mischa,” Will repeats softly, not missing the way Hannibal seems to shiver at hearing her name pass from someone else’s lips. Will doesn’t ask what happened, is confident that Hannibal will tell him as much as he is comfortable with when he’s ready.

He doesn’t have to wait long to hear it. “I was her only guardian after our parents died. As young for the task as I was, there was no one else.” Hannibal pauses for a moment and swallows. “We were snowed in. That winter was especially cold and lean, and we were alone for most of it. Then she became sick.” Hannibal does not go on, he stops it there, but Will has already heard enough.

He reaches over and clasps his hand over Hannibal’s knee, keeping it there for the rest of the drive. When they pull to a stop at last in the driveway, he undoes his seatbelt but leans closer rather than get out, bringing his other hand up to turn the Alpha’s face gently to look at him.

“You know I love you, right?” he asks, one of the rare few times he says it even now because the words don’t come as easily to him as they do for Hannibal. He feels no awkwardness as he says them now.

Hannibal tugs him close enough to hug him as tightly as the console and the round baby bump between them will allow, and kisses him as if it’s the only thing he wants to do for the rest of his life. The two of them stay like that in the car and just hold each other for awhile, until their legs eventually begin to cramp.

Chapter End Notes

~~What, a single throwaway sentence in the very first chapter totally qualifies as a clue, right?~~ ;D

Hold onto your butts. Things are about to pick up rather quickly from here, lovelies.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

> Got this update done just in time for the finale tomorrow, woo-hoo! ~~Ha ha ha, someone hold me.~~ Incidentally if you're one of the lucky souls who already knows something, please do NOT give out any spoilers or hints, thank you. I want to be surprised.
>
> Warning ahead for allusions to a past forced abortion/hysterectomy. Poor Margot can't catch a break in this verse either, I'm afraid. :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's baby shower/going away on maternity leave party takes place on a Thursday, the last day of classes for him. He learns about it only after his final class lets out and he heads downstairs to spend the remainder of that afternoon finishing up work in the lab. Beverly, having listened after all to his pleas not to make a big deal out of it, had opted to surprise him by simply decorating the lab while he was in class and throwing together a small intimate gathering of just them, the science team, Jack, Alana, and of course, Hannibal. Will shakes his head and laughs to see all of them waiting there when he arrives, balloons everywhere, a pile of presents on one of the autopsy tables in the center of the room with cake, punch, and an assortment of other refreshments laid out on the other.

"I thought you had appointments today," Will says dryly when Hannibal walks over to greet him with a kiss on the cheek.

"I canceled and rescheduled most of them a week ago," Hannibal admits, eyes glinting mischievously. "I couldn't miss such a momentous occasion as this."

"Well, you could have given me some warning at least," says Will with a playful punch to the Alpha's arm.

"And spoil the surprise Ms. Katz arranged especially for you? I dare say she would have had my head for that."

"Damn straight," says Bev. "Now come here, baby mama," she says, ignoring Will's groan as she pulls him in for a loose hug. "I'm gonna miss you, champ. It's gonna be so boring here without you around!"

"Thanks, dear," calls out Zee.

"You really know how to make us feel warm and special inside," adds Price.

Jack simply shakes his head with a weary smile on his face as if he can't believe how he got saddled with a team full of such children.

“It’s only for a little while, Bev. I’ll be back before you know it.”

“Not *too* soon though,” she chides. “I might miss you, but I’ll also whack you upside the head and send you back home if you try to show up before you’re ready.”

“Not to worry,” says Hannibal. “I imagine Will and I will be quite occupied in the months to come. Perhaps I should consider taking some time off myself.” Will and he glance over at one another and share a smile.

“Alright, enough of the sappy stuff,” says Zeller. “Let’s get this party started already.”

“You do realize this is a *baby shower,* right?” asks Jack when Zee pulls up a playlist on the computer and hits play on a wildly inappropriate hip-hop song for the occasion.

“Hey, she’s the one who put this together!” says Brian, pointing over at his girlfriend.

“Oh sure, blame it all on me,” argues Katz, sauntering back to both of her boyfriends. “You two bozos helped!”

“I object to being called a bozo on the count that I never denied anything,” Jimmy interjects.

Will has a hand over his face that does a very poor job of suppressing the silly grin he’s sporting, much less the few amused titters that manage to escape. Hannibal can hardly keep his eyes from the younger man.

It doesn’t matter at all that this is a far cry from the sort of celebration Hannibal would have organized had he been charged with the task. He drinks in the sight of his Omega’s features flushed red with mirth and good cheer and cannot find it in himself to care in the least about anything else.

“Do I get a hug as well?” Alana asks, wrapping her arms around Will’s shoulders as well when the other Omega graciously nods. The tiniest flare of jealousy curls in Hannibal’s chest at the sight, still moderately wary because of Will’s previous misplaced affections for the woman. He need only look at the ring glinting on Will’s hand and the large swell of their child slumbering beneath his oversized shirt, however, to be reminded that he is the victor here and that any concerns he may have of that becoming an issue again are entirely unfounded.

“I’m with Beverly on this one,” she says as they part. “Sad as I am to see you go, I’m also glad of it. You need the break, and you two deserve the time to get away from all other distractions and just be happy.” Enough time has passed for Alana to be almost entirely over her previous disapproval. Seeing them together, the way they look at each other, it’s impossible for her not to be pleased for her friends, even if a part of her may always be a little disappointed by the circumstances that led them there, and maybe an even smaller part always just a little preoccupied with thoughts of *maybes* and *what-ifs* where she and Will are concerned. It’s nothing that she’ll ever let get in the way of her caring and support for both of them.

Hannibal's smile shifts to her as he thanks her for her good wishes, and then the three of them rejoin the rest of the party to mingle with the others.

"You two take care of each other, alright?" Jack says as they approach him, clapping each of them once on the shoulder before letting go. "And that little one. I may not see you for awhile, Graham, but don't think that means you're off the hook from sending me pictures," he says with a half-doting, almost grandfatherly glance down at Will's abdomen.

"Will do, Jack," says Will. It's still amazing to him how much everyone's demeanor seems to have slowly changed over the last several months as Will shows up for work every day more and more noticeably pregnant, but Jack's is the most surprising. He had thought for sure the man would be grumpier as his maternity leave neared, but he only seems to have mellowed instead. Will doesn't hold any illusions that this means he won't be worked harder than a mule once he eventually returns, but it's an entertaining transformation to witness nevertheless.

"Perhaps we can do one better than that," Hannibal says. "Once Will is feeling up to it and we're all settled in at home, you should bring Bella by for dinner to meet the newest addition to our family." Will loves the way he can't seem to hide the little smile on his face as he says words like 'home' and 'family,' matching it with one of his own as he idly caresses his own belly.

"I look forward to it," Jack says warmly.

For the rest of the party, Will relishes the opportunity to eat as much junk food as he wants while Hannibal looks on with a fond exasperated look, much to the amusement of the others. They open presents together next, Will rushing to get them through it as quickly as possible so he can thank everyone and be done with it. This is one of the reasons he's never been one for birthday parties or the like. The act of opening gifts in front of everyone always makes him feel awkward and embarrassed.

Finally, when the last of them are done, Bev says, "Hold on, I've got one more for you," walking up to him with one hand behind her back.

"But I just opened yours," Will complains.

"You are the worst gift-receiver ever, now shush. Besides, I was lying anyway. It's not really for you." She pulls out from behind her back the most absurd-looking pink plushie Will has ever seen. "A kitty to always remind the little sprogget of their favorite Auntie Katz!"

"That's a cat?" Will asks skeptically, taking the thing off her hands. "It has ten tails and no legs."

"Tentacles," she corrects with relish.

"Tentacles? *Babe,"* Zee interjects, "isn't that a tad inappropriate for a little kid?"

"Last I checked we weren't living in an anime," says Beverly. "Get your mind out of the gutter!"

“I...thank you?” says Will. He blinks down at the thing, then back up at her again and adds, “You know you’re weird though, right?”

“Coming from you, that’s a compliment, buddy,” she says, slinging her arm around his shoulders one last time in a parting hug. “Now get the hell out of here before I throw you out.”

“You know less about how to end a party than I do,” Will grumbles.

“Party’s not over,” says Price. “We’re just waiting for the pregnant one to leave so we can break out the booze.”

“Well, gee, thanks. Disinvited to my own party, if that isn’t the story of my life, I don’t know what is.”

“Out!” Bev repeats, laughing, and starts pushing him toward the door. “Don’t make me ask your fiancé to sling you over his shoulder and carry you.”

Will glances to Hannibal, as if assessing whether or not the Alpha would actually do it, and sighs overdramatically to see the wicked gleam in his eye that says, *Yes, yes, I would.* “Fine. I guess I’m going now.” He turns slightly to better face everyone, eyes on no one in particular. “So...this is it then. You won’t be seeing me around for awhile.” He pauses like he’s about to say more, but then makes a face and shrugs, as if suddenly remembering who he is. “Yeah, that’s all I wanted to say. Bye, guys.” With that, he turns back around and heads for the door.

“Call if you need anything,” Alana says, lifting her voice slightly since she’s speaking from across the room. “Both of you,” she says, looking at Hannibal.

“You’re stealing my lines, missy,” says Beverly. “Same goes for me, champ.”

Will simply gives a thumbs-up in the air without turning around, and walks out.

“I suppose it is my turn to depart as well then,” says Hannibal.

Jack chuckles good-naturedly. “Go catch up to him. We’ll pack up this stuff and help you carry it back to your car.”

“I’ll walk him to his car first and return afterwards to gather up the gifts. Thank you, everyone, truly, for this lovely send-off. Especially you, Miss Katz.” Beverly gives him a two-fingered salute, and then he steps out into the hall.

“Took you long enough,” Will says, smirking, as Hannibal meets him where he was waiting by the elevators.

“I had to say my own goodbyes.” Hannibal gestures for Will to get on first as the elevator doors slide open.

“So, meet you back at the house for a late lunch?” Will asks as if he didn’t just gorge himself on cake and chips and assorted other terrible sugary substances.

“Dinner. I’m afraid I was unable to reschedule one appointment for this evening. I’ll need to leave straight from here to the office to make it there in time.”

“Ah.” Will has to roll his bottom lip into his mouth to keep from frowning, annoyed at himself for feeling *disappointed* as if he doesn’t see enough of the man every day. The elevator dings and Will walks out first, Hannibal following closely behind.

They walk in companionable silence the rest of the way to Will’s car, where Will stops and turns around to look up at his mate. “Don’t keep me waiting too long, okay?”

“Never. My mate and his appetite will be terribly cross with me if I don’t have dinner on the table promptly by eight.”

“Seven,” Will compromises.

Hannibal chuckles fondly, his expression warm and affectionate. “Seven,” he agrees without trying to negotiate. Will leans up to kiss him then before getting into his car. Hannibal watches him turn out of the parking lot before heading back inside.

*

Once home, Will goes straight to the pantry to get what he needs to make the dogs’ food. He has it down to a quick rhythm after years of practice, having it done in no time at all and carrying it out to the newly finished kennel. His canine companions crowd him eagerly as he pours it into their bowls, but know not to jump overexcitedly around him in his condition.

All but one of them, at least. “Buster, come back!” Will calls out as the little terrier scampers off for the open back door to the house, apparently more interested in the rare opportunity to poke around indoors again than the food, unlike the rest of his pack. Will heaves out a sigh that’s also half-exasperated groan and follows as quickly as his much-slowed waddle will allow without tripping over his own feet.

He picks up the pace a bit more as he hears something crash and break in the kitchen. *“Buster?”* he calls out concernedly, though he didn’t hear a yelp, and relaxes minutely when the little dog runs happily out into the hall to greet him at the sound of his own name, obviously unhurt.

“What did you do?” he asks, hands on his hips, tone stern enough that the little dog’s eagerness diminishes and he glances to the floor and whines, shame-faced. Will sighs again. “Come on, outside with you,” he says, and this time Buster obeys. Will shuts the door carefully behind him and heads to the kitchen to find whatever mess awaits him.

Fortunately, it’s not *too* bad. He’d left the pantry door open but luckily everything in there was too far out of the dog’s reach. The only mess is a broken jar of pickles Buster had somehow managed to knock down from the bottommost shelf. Will shuffles off to grab a broom and returns to sweep the broken glass, though getting everything into the dustpan is a grueling task with his belly making it almost impossible to bend. He lowers himself carefully to his knees to pick up the remaining pickles and soak up the juice with a large dishrag.

It's down on the ground, close to eye level with the bottom shelves and peering into the shadows they cast that he's never paid attention to before, looking for lingering spots of mess that may need to be cleaned up, that he notices for the first time the almost invisible seams in the floorboards.

"Huh." Will sits back on his haunches and rolls his shoulders, stretching his back. Most likely it's just a crawlspace, a way to get around under the house. An odd place for it perhaps, but still nothing to get too excited about. And yet...

Will has only been down to the basement once, when Hannibal showed him where the breaker box was and pointed out the rest of his wine collection against the far wall. He remembers commenting that it was smaller than he would have expected considering the size of the house, and Hannibal explaining that he had bricked off the rest, not liking the drafty, gloomy feel of the large, overexpansive space. He had then swept Will up into his arms and carried him back up the stairs, the Omega giggling even as he demanded to be put back down, which he eventually was—upstairs, on the bed, where he was agreeably distracted from asking any more questions about the house for the rest of the evening.

Even barring the rather eccentric, almost pretentious reason given for dividing up the basement, it makes perfect sense that one would still need access to that unused space. It may not have even been intentional of him not to tell Will about it, so insignificant even as an afterthought that he simply forgot to mention it. That's most likely what he will say, if Will asks him about it when he gets home. Hannibal most likely uses this as no more than a storage area, Will reasons, if he uses it at all. *And yet...*

Gripping one of the higher sturdy shelves for leverage, Will rises to his feet, then pads softly out of the room to get a flashlight.

*

The Beta stares silently out the window for a minute in contemplation, back turned to him, before she turns around and says, "Thank you for agreeing to see me on such short notice, Doctor Lecter."

"You may call me Hannibal if you wish, Margot. You are no longer my patient. No need to stand on ceremony."

Margot smiles, a small graceful tilt of the lips that can be equally earnest and sly at the same time without contradiction. "Hannibal then. Would you say we're friends?" she asks.

"A cutting question," Hannibal says. "I would say, out of all of the people I've met and gotten to know over the years, you are one of the few who has gotten closest."

"A cutting answer," Margot replies. "Although I would have to say, *same.* There aren't many people I know who I can fully trust. There aren't any actually. Out of all of them though you are...closest. I guess that's why I'm here," she says. "As a friend."

Hannibal rests his hands in his pockets and leans back comfortably against his desk. "Friends offer each other support in times of need, a listening ear, advice whenever solicited or

otherwise deemed necessary."

"You've offered me plenty of all that in the past, beyond what most psychiatrists would," she says wryly. "It's time I returned the favor."

"And what favor would that be, Margot?"

"The advice." She swallows lightly, carefully considering her next statement and how it will be received, then glances up at him and states softly but clearly, *"Disappear."*

Hannibal doesn't so much as lift a surprised eyebrow. If anything, he seems more relaxed than before. "I'm quite comfortable with the life I have built here, and the numerous almost-friendships I have formed," he says with a sharp smile.

Margot looks away from him again, frustrated by his laxity, and runs her fingers worryingly over the deep red curtain of the window beside her for a moment. "Your mate seems nice," she says finally after almost a minute. To anyone else, it might sound non-sequitur and conversational.

She could be imagining it, but for just a moment out of the corner of her eye, she thinks she sees the man stiffen slightly and go very, very still, then deliberately relax again as though nothing had happened. "Will mentioned seeing you at the gallery the other day. I was disappointed to learn I had missed you."

"I wasn't avoiding you, if that's what you're asking," Margot replies. "I couldn't stay long. If Mason figures out I've been talking with either of you…" She trails off and lets the statement dangle in the air between them.

"And how is your brother by the way, Margot?"

"Recovering," she answers bitterly. "The miracles of where money, physical therapy, and black market hormones will get you." Hannibal merely raises an eyebrow at this last and she elaborates, "It's been a strange past couple of years in the Verger household. All Mason will say about the reason for his decision is that you taught him where the real power was."

"Power comes from a number of places. Gender does unfortunately still have a role in the power one wields in society, as you yourself have been made all too painfully aware of many times." Margot clenches her jaw tightly at this remark and nods. "Being an Omega or a Beta does not make one powerless, however. Being an ignorant, repugnant little fool on the other hand," he suggests, drawing another tiny smile from the Beta woman.

"You're pretty much all he talks about these days," she informs him. "He wants revenge for what you took from him."

"For what he took from himself," Hannibal corrects. "The shard was in his hand, not mine," he adds, smiling. "And it was far too little penance, I think, after what he first took from you."

Her hands do not stray from her sides to cradle protectively over the scar on her abdomen at the reminder, only because she deliberately keeps them still. “I agree,” she says softly, “though I thought I would be more satisfied with how things turned out at the time.”

“Regardless of how it happened,” she continues, “Mason’s been waiting a long time to punish you in a manner he views as suited to your crimes.” She turns then to look at Hannibal straight on. “Now what sort of thoughts do you suppose crossed his mind when he heard about your Omega?”

*

Even with the beam of the flashlight to guide him, the deep darkness of the room below envelops him from all sides, closing in and creeping along his skin as if seeking a way to seep into his pores. The first thing he searches for before he tries to look at anything else is a light switch somewhere on the wall near the stairs.

When he finds it, he is temporarily blinded by the bright white light that floods the room and banishes the darkness from it. Only then does he click off his torch and *look* at what the darkness has been hiding.

It is a very practical workman’s space, with metal tables and plastic sheeting and power tools hung up on the walls. It is not wholly sterile. Some artwork does adorn the walls, framed sketches that look to be Hannibal’s own, many of them more macabre pieces than what’s he’s glimpsed in the Alpha’s sketchbooks before, or playful homages and brilliant reproductions of acclaimed masterpieces. Along the far right wall hum two gleaming walk-in freezers.

There is no dawning comprehension nor building horror gradually spreading across Will’s consciousness. He sees and he immediately *knows.* Still, he steps further into the room.

He looks first at the art along the walls and is surprised to find his own presence there. No sketches of his face or anything so obvious as that *(the pigs who find themselves down here do not deserve such a sight)* but he recognizes himself in one careful, meticulous study of a pair of callused hands, and again in the outline of a shoulder bearing the familiar, star-shaped scar from when he was stabbed as a cop. Hanging above one of the tables, he finds an arrangement of what look to be his own fishing hooks dangling from thin wire, and is reminded then of his dream from a week ago.

Just as he is reaching to touch one, his other hand caressing comfortingly over his belly, one of the freezers kicks on and hums louder than before. Will turns his head to look directly at them both. He stares.

He walks to them next.

*

“I appreciate your concern for us, Margot, and your coming here to warn me. I will not soon forget it.”

“That’d be a little more reassuring to hear if I were confident you actually plan to do something with it.”

“I am planning to do something,” Hannibal says. “Just not what you intended. You expect me to run, to flee for the hills with my husband and child. That is not the life I want for my family.” Margot casts her eyes to the floor, pained and saddened, but understanding. “No. I will handle this, Margot. But I will do it my way, not yours.”

She nods to show that she understands and accepts. “I may not like it much, but I suppose there really are worse things than being broke. Just do it soon, okay? I don’t know how much time either of us has.”

On the drive home, Hannibal contemplates whether any part of Mason Verger’s body will be worth saving by the time he’s through with him. Not on his table certainly; Verger is unworthy and unfit even as a meal for he and his mate. As long as the flesh is not unhealthy, however, there would be no harm in feeding it instead to the dogs. Hannibal finds he is more fond of having pets now than he ever would have suspected when he considers it from this angle.

Hannibal enters through the front door, and hearing no sounds of anyone bustling about the house, assumes that Will is most likely napping or doing something in his own office. He is therefore mildly surprised to find his mate standing beside one of the gleaming marble countertops in the kitchen. He sniffs subtly, catching the scent of dill in the room.

“Were you snacking before I arrived? I hope you still have an appetite for dinner,” Hannibal says, rolling up his sleeves in preparation. “Anything in particular you would like?”

“Oh, I’m sure the same thing as always will be fine,” Will says, voice deceptively soft and light. He turns to meet Hannibal’s eyes for the first time since he entered the room.

Something akin to bone-chilling comprehension and curious excitement bubbles up in Hannibal all at once as he catches the full implications of that statement. He notices now that the scent is emanating most strongly from the trashbin and the pantry, and deduces what must have happened.

“The thing is I wanted to be horrified but I wasn’t even...surprised enough for that,” Will admits, smiling shakily at the other man from across the island countertop. “All the gaps in my knowledge of you just suddenly made perfect sense.” He half-shrugs, letting out a hollow, panting sort of laugh like the kind Hannibal used to hear during their therapy sessions. “I think I knew even before I went down there.”

“Will...” Hannibal whispers, hearing his own breath catch. He wishes he could have seen the epiphany lighting Will’s eyes as he made his discoveries below, to capture it in one of his private sketchbooks that no one else is allowed to see and imprint it forever in his memory palace.

“I was still debating whether or not to call Jack when you walked in. Out of anyone, he deserves to know. You’re his white whale,” Will tells him, swallowing. “The Chesapeake Ripper.”

“But you didn’t call,” Hannibal says. Will seems to bristle at that, as though offended by the man’s triumphant tone.

“No,” Will says, voice now quavering. “Every time I tried to pick up the phone, it felt… cowardly, like I was being gutless for not confronting you with it myself. More fool I, really, for thinking that way.” His eyes are wet, almost on the brink of tears though they don’t fall just yet, and he’s still wearing the same tiny smile as if he can’t help it. “I guess it’s a little too late for that option now.”

“It is,” Hannibal agrees. “You aren’t a coward, Will. You haven’t turned me in yet because you don’t want to.”

“Was any of this ever real? Or were you just planning to keep me ensnared so I wouldn’t reveal who you really are?”

“The latter would require certainty on my part what your reaction would be to the truth, which I will admit I did not possess. I could never entirely predict you, Will.”

Will looks away, as if the tender expression on Hannibal’s face as he says this is too much for him to bear. “You lied to me,” he says harshly, as if to counteract the effect of the other man’s words. “You manipulated.” He rolls his lip into his mouth and bites down on it lightly, then says more softly, “Our son or daughter is not even born yet and already a cannibal, and I...I don’t think I can forgive you for that.”

“I see,” Hannibal says, disappointed, and Will straightens warily as if this is the verbal cue he has been waiting for the whole time. “Then I can only hope you will change your mind in time.”

Will bolts for the other door to the left at almost the same time Hannibal moves to vault over the countertop between them, running into the dining room as quickly as he can manage with his large, unwieldy, precious cargo.

He goes immediately for the sliding glass door, panicked and terrified now, fingers still fumbling clumsily with the latch to try to get it open when Hannibal enters behind him. He gives up on the door and tries to make a dash for the hallway instead, hoping to have better luck with the front entrance.

He doesn’t even make it more than a few feet from the dining table before a powerful set of arms snake around him from behind, causing him to wobble enough from the struggle that both of them fall crashing to the ground, Hannibal maneuvering to ensure his left arm takes most of the impact from the floor rather than Will’s belly. Without pausing and hardly a sound acknowledging his own pain, he brings the other arm around Will’s neck and locks him into a chokehold, quickly cutting the empath’s air supply.

The tears that threatened to break earlier spill freely down Will’s cheeks now, as he struggles futilely to claw at the arm choking him and pull it away. Hannibal’s other hand comes up then to stroke comfortingly through his curls.

“Shhh,” Hannibal soothes against his ear and croons softly in a language Will only understands bits and pieces of. *“Viskas gerai, mano meile. Aš neleisiu nieko blogo judviem atsitikti. Dabar eik miegoti, mielasis.”*

Will’s grip weakens as he loses strength and his vision starts to go black around the edges. Echoing louder even over the sweetly whispered words is the sound of hooves, and the familiar antlers of the ravenstag start to come into view from just around the corner right as he succumbs entirely to darkness.

Chapter End Notes

~~If Google Translate isn't a rotten liar...~~ A kind commenter below has informed me that Google Translate was indeed a liar in this case and provided me with some accurate Lithuanian that *isn't* total gibberish this time--thank you, Pasanger! <3 The translation now reads: "Everything is alright, my love. I won't let anything bad happen to the two of you. Now go to sleep, darling."

And yes, if you were wondering (and aren't still reeling from the drastic shift in tone between the start of this chapter and the end) Tentacle Kitty is a real thing you can really buy. Mine sits next to my pillow at night and watches over me. His name is Tentacles (pronounced Ten-tuh-clees, like Heracles). You're welcome. ;)

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Omg, I made myself cry writing the first and second parts of this, don't look at me! :'(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Consciousness returns to him gradually in waves. He is aware first of sensation—his dry, parched throat, the soft feel of the mattress beneath him, his baby's waking kicks. Then comes sound, or rather, the peculiar lack of sound. Without even seeing it yet, the room he is in feels closed off, isolated, a little bubble of space insulated from the rest of the world. He wakes feeling claustrophobic before he has even opened his eyes.

Little changes when he does finally open them and look. The room is small and concrete, and he knows instantly that he is back in the hidden basement, in some alcove he didn't notice during his first short visit. He sits up and looks around, noticing right away the much "homier" feel to the room than the rest of the basement—the plush thick rugs covering the floor, the shelf lined with books along the far wall, the tiny round café table and two chairs, the wide privacy screen a few meters away from the foot of the bed, which he realizes after craning his head around a little hides a small metal toilet, sink, and bathtub. He has never been so terrified of such a cozy-looking space in his life.

He knows before he even reaches the heavy-looking door on the opposite wall that there's no way it will open, but he tries it anyway. It won't budge, and after yelling and banging his hands fruitlessly against it for a few minutes, he realizes it must be sound-proofed. No one will be able to hear him unless they're down here on this side of the basement with him.

He settles back onto the bed heavily, burying his face in his hands and willing himself desperately not to cry or panic. He understands perfectly well what's going on here. He won't cry anymore. Crying is useless.

He hears footsteps approaching only when they're a few meters from the door, echoing slightly off the concrete flooring. He straightens his back and tenses warily. He won't run, not immediately. He's already learned the hard way that'll only get him nowhere fast. If he wants out of this room, he'll have to be much smarter about it and come up with an actual plan, maybe weaken the Alpha's defenses somehow.

The lock turns loudly, and then the door opens. Hannibal walks in bearing a tray laden with a steaming bowl of stew or soup, a plate of salad, tea, and even a small saucer piled with Oreos and a daub of peanut butter. The sight of it manages somehow to irk Will more than anything. Hannibal smiles softly at him over the tray in his hands. Will turns his head and looks away.

“Who’s on the menu tonight?” he asks with feigned blandness. It bothers him that he isn’t *more* bothered by this, numbed by the shock enough to feel little more than resigned and annoyed.

The tray is set down carefully on the small table and one of the chairs brought over to the bed. Hannibal sits directly in front of Will, close enough that their knees are almost brushing, but not quite. Will notices that his question remains unanswered as the man finally speaks, “I know this is a far cry from our bedroom upstairs, but I have endeavored to make it as warm and comfortable a space for you as possible until we come to a more suitable arrangement. If you want, after dinner I can bring some of the dogs down here to play and keep you company for a little while.”

“Not going to stay to keep me company yourself, Doctor Lecter?”

“Do you want me to stay, Will?” he asks, ignoring the deliberate return to his title and last name.

Will’s smile is jagged and sharp as he turns his head back to look at him finally. “What do you think, Doctor?” Something does flicker behind the Alpha’s eyes then, the corners of his mouth turning downward in the smallest of frowns for a moment before his expression smooths again.

“I think Winston and the others are likely to be far more welcome than I, for the moment.”

“How long are you planning to keep me down here?” Will presses. “What will you tell Jack and the others when they start asking about me?”

“I suspect that won’t happen for some time, Will. Your friends all know what a private person you are, and they certainly don’t expect to see you now that you’ve left on sabbatical. Given that many Omegas with far fewer problems being sociable choose to retreat from society and nest at home in the weeks leading up to and following childbirth, I imagine it would not be difficult to convince them you have no desire to accept visitors for quite a long while.”

Will feels something like a long, throat-shattering scream perched just beneath his chin, because of course Hannibal is right. “Looks like you thought of everything then.”

“On the contrary,” Hannibal admits. “Much of what I do is one part careful planning, the designs for this room for instance, but the rest I tend to make up as I go, depending on which direction the wind blows.”

“Whimsy,” Will says, chuckling bitterly to himself. “No wonder Jack Crawford can never catch you.” Will caresses his belly with one hand, the left with its shining rose gold band still glimmering on his finger, and looks down at them both. “Was all of this just whimsy?”

“No.” Will snaps back to attention at the firm, earnest tone, for the first time really meeting Hannibal’s gaze so he can look beyond it. What he sees is enough to send cold shivers racing down his spine and make him pant heavily, feeling as though he cannot pull enough air into his lungs fast enough, drowning, drowning in dark turbulent waters full of so much *possession, longing, need, love, mine, love, love, LOVE...*

“Will Graham,” Hannibal says, smiling, delighted to finally be able to unleash the full depth of his feelings and the truth of himself, and reaches up to gently cradle one side of Will’s face with his hand. Will doesn’t even flinch at the contact, the claiming scar on his neck twinging as if in sympathy at the Alpha’s touch. “After meeting you, for the first time I believe in the real possibility of the existence of fortune and destiny.”

Will breathes in shakily, like a dying man breaking the surface of the water and coming up for air before the waves pull him under again. Hannibal’s eyes are dark, adoring and obsessive, and with genuine terror Will feels an answering call beating inside his own chest, one that makes him want to scoot closer and bury himself snugly in the arms of one of the most prolific serial killers in modern history. He wonders then, desperate and half-hysterical, if it’s too late already to put a halt on those feelings and sever the growing bond between them.

He knows the answer as intimately as if Hannibal had leaned in and whispered it into his ear. *It was too late from the moment we met.*

*

For the next few days, Will tries not to lose his mind from boredom. He sits in contemplation, thinking of all the signs that were there and how he had missed them, but more importantly thinking about what he can do to get out of the basement. The most obvious route is to convince Hannibal that he can be trusted to be let out, a task easier said than done given his reactions so far, and the fact that the thought of lying to do it leaves a sick feeling in his stomach. As a result, he doesn’t do much to actually change his behavior towards the Alpha; anything he might try would be immediately suspicious to the other man anyway.

He had also considered starving himself in protest for all of about half a minute that first day, at least until his stomach had grumbled at the scent of soup wafting up from the bowl, and the baby had started kicking eagerly as if in agreement. “Okay, I know, baby. I know you’re hungry,” he’d said softly, talking to it as he has been doing for awhile with no one else around, then sat at the table and made the conscious decision to stop thinking about what he was putting in his mouth while he ate.

He knows that whatever the origins of the meat, Hannibal will provide nothing less than the best for them at his table. The baby’s continuing health and nutrition are more important to him than any other human life or his own morals, and he can’t even bring himself to feel guilty about the fact.

Funny how becoming a parent can change one’s perspective and make things that used to seem so complicated suddenly appear much simpler.

Then, as if just to make sure Hannibal understood that him eating what was provided wasn’t the same as him condoning the Alpha’s actions, Will had quietly slipped the ring off of his finger and placed it on the center of the tray for Hannibal to find when he came back to pick it up later. He had to turn away again when it happened, unable to bear looking at the Alpha’s micro change in expression when he saw it.

It still itches at the back of his mind when he thinks about it, making his resolve waver worryingly. He has no idea what he's going to do once he gets out. Go straight to Jack probably, like he should have done in the first place. Yet even now the thought of it feels like the worst sort of betrayal, no matter how much he reminds himself that it's right, that it's no more than what the Alpha deserves after lying to him and—Will knows now without needing to ask—using his fears surrounding his own mental stability to *manipulate* him into a relationship in the first place. In Will's mind, it's the second worst crime Hannibal has committed in order to get them to this point.

The first, of course, is Abigail.

It's on a particularly solemn evening between them as Hannibal comes to collect dishes that Will finally works up the courage to ask the one question he needs the answer to more than anything.

"Why Abigail, Hannibal? *Why her?"*

Hannibal freezes in what he's doing, and a peculiar expression Will has never seen before sweeps across his face. It takes a moment for Will to recognize it as *regret* before it vanishes completely.

"A place was made for her in our family," Hannibal admits quietly. "She did not want it. It became apparent to me that she was more a hindrance and a threat to it than an aide any longer."

"She got in your way," Will clarifies for him, wiping away the slow line of tears on his cheek as they come. "So you got rid of her."

"Yes. I wish there had been another way, but there was not. Nothing that would have preserved her as she was, at least. I grieve her as much as you do, Will."

"Somehow I doubt that," Will says. He then thinks about what the alternative might have been, her alone and isolated in a tiny room like this perhaps, and shudders. Maybe in some way what actually happened is better, loathe as he is to admit that to himself. "What if I ever get in your way like that? Or our child? What will you do then?"

It is Hannibal's turn to shudder, as if the implied distrust in that line of questioning wounds him physically. "No harm will come to either of you as long as I draw breath," he vows.

"You're harming me now," Will points out, indicating the room around him. Hannibal only shakes his head.

"I am keeping you safe," he tells the Omega.

"Safe from what?" Will asks. "Safe from going to the police? That's not keeping me safe, Hannibal, that's keeping *you* safe. It's selfish." His lips quirk up wryly. "I guess you did try to warn me of that, in your own way."

Hannibal seems for once unsure how to respond, and Will sighs, weary and unwilling to carry the conversation on further for now. “I’d like you to go now please,” he says quietly.

Hannibal breathes in deeply through his nose, his own eyes liquid and pained, and nods once, quickly gathering up the dishes and exiting the room.

Upstairs, Hannibal continues with the preparations he has not discussed with Will yet, not wanting to alarm his mate into attempting something rash. He has already packed some clothes for them both, as well as a few other essential supplies. He had not wanted to run as Margot suggested, but Will’s ill-timed discovery has forced his hand. He cannot deal with both the threat from Mason and the FBI investigation that will inevitably come at the same time when Will’s friends begin to ask why he has been out of contact for so long. They cannot stay in America any longer.

Tomorrow he will have to go to meet with an acquaintance with a private plane and give a convincing story as to why they need to borrow it in a rush, since no airline in the United States will be willing to fly with a newborn and seven dogs on board, and also would certainly ask questions about the mother being in a tranquilized or drugged state already before arrival.

He would simply drive them across the Canadian border and come up with a more permanent arrangement later, if it weren’t for the fact that Will’s due date could be any day now. If he is to be the only one assisting with the birth, as seems likely now, then he will need his supplies here and the convenience of the bedroom upstairs. He cannot risk his mate going into labor while they are out on the road, potentially far from any possible help.

When all the household chores and other little arrangements are taken care of, he allows himself a moment at last to sit heavily on the now too-large, too-empty bed and hide his face behind steepled hands. These last few days have taken more of an emotional toll on him than he ever could have predicted. Never could he have imagined his instincts would be so at war with one another, wanting to protect and provide and rip the face off of whoever put such a melancholy, at times fearful, expression on his Omega’s features of late, unable to do so because that person is *himself.*

Nor had he been prepared for how devastated he would be by Will’s somber, wordless rejection. He had expected a number of other scenarios, had been prepared for his Will to rage, to rail against him and denounce his actions as monstrous, but not…*not this.*

He pulls the ring out of his pocket and lets it sit heavily in the palm of his hand, as he has done several times now over the past few days, often immediately after seeing Will and attending to his needs. His fingers curl around it into a fist, which he raises slowly to rest against his lips and squeezes his eyes shut tightly, as if in prayer.

He vows in his head silently that he will make this right. He will earn his Omega’s trust again somehow, after the immediate pressing concerns of their safety and security are addressed, and slide this ring back onto Will’s finger with no more lies and betrayed glances between them. He has to. To live with anything less would be too unbearable and cruel.

*

The next morning Hannibal comes down with breakfast and packed sandwiches for lunch, an apology on his lips for having to leave Will alone for a few hours while he runs a few errands out of town. Will glares at him, wary and suspicious, but says nothing in response. Part of him wonders if it's even true or if this is some sort of test, to see what Will will do if he thinks he has enough time alone to try something. As if there is anything *to* try that he hasn't attempted already.

It's difficult not to think about what he might be doing after he's gone, whether he left on a simple work-related errand or one of the Ripper variety. He hadn't said and Will felt better off not asking.

He feels sort of nervous, twitchy and restless for reasons he can't explain, which no amount of pacing or attempted reading can seem to dissipate. The only thing that seems to help is when he crawls back into bed and rearranges the blankets, over and over again, until they finally are piled just right, allowing him to nestle into them like a sheltering cocoon.

He does not realize he is beginning to drift into an uneasy nap until a loud noise startles him back into full alertness. At first he thinks Hannibal has returned early, until he realizes the noise is *multiple* sets of footsteps on the wooden stairs to the hidden basement, and he can just start to make out the murmur of gruff voices speaking in Italian.

"Boys, boys! English please, comprende, compagnos?"

Will stands, careful not to let the bed squeak as he gets up, and makes his way over to the table where he grabs a fork and watches the door, waiting.

"Now let's see," says the third voice in a loud, aggravating sing-song voice, *"if I was a scared little Omega trying to hide from the big scary men in my Alpha's creepy murder dungeon, where would I be?"* The voice gets louder as it gets closer. *"Perhaps behind...Door Number One?"*

Another voice, female and somewhat familiar, murmurs something else Will can't make out except for the words "locked" and "outside." *"Yes, I noticed that, sister dear, thank you. Carlo? Be a doll and open it up anyway, would you? I'm curious to see what else our esteemed Dottore has to hide behind lock and key."*

As the door unlatches and starts to creak open, Will half-turns to hide the fork behind him without making it obvious he's doing so.

Two large burly men enter, followed closely by a man with a scarred, lipless face, spiky blond hair, and a curious limp to his walk.

"Oh good, and here I was just beginning to worry our princess might be in another castle." He peers around the cramped little room with avid interest. "Now let me guess...relationship troubles?" The man laughs at his own little joke, giggling and nearly bouncing on the balls of his feet like an overgrown, giddy child.

Behind his back, Will's grip on the fork tightens.

Chapter End Notes

Oh noes! What happens now?? **cackles maniacally**

...so sorry, I couldn't resist. I'll try not to make you wait more than a few days at the most for the next update. ;)

(P.S. Mason does not understand or care to understand how to speak Italian. In case you were wondering why he seems to have little idea what he's saying. :P)

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

> Warnings this chapter for nonconsensual medical procedures, implied threat of rape/sexual abuse (which does NOT actually occur), and Mason being an all around creep and asshole.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The two men in front mutter to each other in Italian, the one in the passenger seat looking back on occasion to shoot Will an ugly look, still holding a handkerchief to the sluggishly bleeding wound in his face where Will's fork had sunk in, right through his cheek. Will makes a point of smiling widely back every time he does it, even though doing so slightly reopens the split in his lip where he'd bitten down on it when the man had backhanded him in retaliation. Will is certain there would have been a harsher reprisal even than that were it not for Verger yelling at the man to stop and not to "mark up his pretty face" even worse.

Now Will is in a car with the four of them, on his way to the Verger estate outside of town. He had gone without a struggle once his only weapon was taken from him, not wanting to risk more than a split lip. He has more than just his own safety to be concerned about.

Despite the sight of trees and buildings rushing past the tinted windows of the limo, Will feels more claustrophobic than ever before, wedged uncomfortably as he is between the two Verger siblings. Margot has her arm around his shoulders, a gesture he's sure is meant to be comforting and act as a buffer against her brother doing the same, though it hadn't stopped the man from ostentatiously slipping his arm on top of hers and waggling his eyebrows suggestively at the both of them. He'd much rather shrug them both off and burrow under a weighted blanket or two or ten, but that not being an option, he'll accept the meager protection her touch offers from the other one.

Mason Verger smells…strange. There is no other word for it. Will has met people with mixed gender types before; it's not all that uncommon to meet Beta-Omegas or Beta-Alphas. All of those people had delicate, barely-there scents which transmitted both sets of pheromone signals in ways that still complemented one another. This is not that.

A naturally occurring Alpha-Omega is a medical impossibility, but that in itself is not cause for concern or the reason Will's stomach flips in revulsion every time he breathes in too deeply through his nose. The scent coming from Mason's glands is almost dizzyingly overpowering and *all wrong* for his body. The hormones are too strong and clash noxiously with each other in a battle for dominance as only black market, experimental injections will, attacking the cells all at once and triggering all kinds of autoimmune reactions rather than gently easing him into a new state. Will observes how he occasionally wipes a bead of sweat from his upper lip and the way his leg is constantly, restlessly twitching, and for just one

uncomfortable moment he feels a swell of pity for the man as he wonders if Mason even remembers what it's like not to feel sick anymore.

Mason, of course, ruins it by speaking. "You and me, we're gonna have some grand, funny old times, aren't we? You and me and baby makes three! And Auntie Margot makes four, isn't that right, precious?" Will has no idea if 'precious' is supposed to be himself, Margot, or the baby, or which possibility of the three makes him cringe more. He just continues staring straight ahead, and Margot's fingers squeeze just a little bit tighter around Will's shoulder, in conjunction with the way Mason's fingers dig more painfully into hers as he speaks.

"Mason…" she says with a hint of worry and fear, her words trailing off uncertainly. It occurs to Will then that she has no more idea what her brother has planned than Will does.

"Didn't I say I was gonna make it up to you, Margot darling? Now no more harsh glares at Papa Mason about the Little Verger Baby That Couldn't, or I'll have to reconsider how involved Auntie gets to be with the Little One That Could!"

Margot's face undergoes a number of small, rapid changes in expression before it settles finally on determinedly blank. Will's face undergoes a similar process but settles on cold, harsh fury instead.

"This is not your baby," he grits out between his teeth, still staring straight ahead.

Mason curls his fingers tightly through Will's hair into a fist and tugs his head sharply so he has to turn to face him, slightly twisted now in his seat so he has to look up at the man to do so. "Now I'm gonna do you a favor, sweetheart, and put that down to just you being cranky from the long car ride. Mommy dearest had probably best learn to be nice from now on if he doesn't want to spend the rest of his days in a breeding harness though, hmm?"

Will's response is to hock back as much moisture as he can and spit it right in Verger's face.

"Mason!" the Beta cries out in alarm as her brother uses all of his leverage to throw Will bodily to the floorboard of the car.

"Now that was just *uncalled for,"* says Mason as he pulls out a handkerchief to wipe up his face.

Margot has her hand stretched out to help Will sit back up, but he doesn't take it. In that moment all of the stress and adrenaline seems to finally overtake him. He shivers and shakes, and then comes the feeling of crushing pain like a vice around his entire abdomen, like the worst set of cramps he's ever experienced in his life. Margot says his name a couple of times worryingly, but Will doesn't respond, too busy chanting in his own mind, *No, no, no, please not now, please not here, not like this!* His body ignores his pleas, however, and Will heaves a dry sob as he feels the warm, wet rush of his water breaking and soaking through his pants.

Mason peers around to get a better look at Will's features, and makes a disappointed clucking noise when he sees dry eyes. "No tears yet, shame. But that's alright, I don't have anything to catch them with me right now anyway." With that, he nonchalantly rummages through his pockets and pulls out a cell phone.

Margot by this time has unbuckled her own seat belt and moved to kneel over Will and help him into a more comfortable lying position, unheeding of the dampness seeping into the knees of her own slacks.

“Cordell!” says Mason jovially into the phone. “Yes, we’re almost there, just a few more minutes. You’d better get your stuff ready and come out to meet us though, it looks like the party’s getting started without you.” He lets out a bark of laughter at whatever is said on the other end of the line. “I know! Lucky, right? Looks like you won’t have to induce after all!”

Margot leans forward, her hair falling around her face like a curtain, doing her best to block out any other sights and sounds in the car as she instructs Will as calmly as she can to breathe. Will wants to yell at her that he can’t with her hovering in his space and making the world seem to darken and close in around him, but he closes his eyes instead, trying to focus on the sound of her voice and remember the breathing exercises from those videos he’s been watching for months.

“Good, good, you’re doing so good,” she says, and Will doesn’t know if she has any idea what she’s talking about or not or if she’s just saying whatever she thinks he needs to hear, but either way it helps a little bit.

“Margot, move aside. You’re in the man’s way.” Will opens his eyes to see Margot being pulled out of the car away from him, one of the Italians holding her back by her arms out of the way as another man, heavyset and balding, clambers in to take her place, wearing a supercilious smile that sets off alarm bells ringing in Will’s brain. Before he can move to scoot back and try to get out on the other side, Will feels the jab of a needle in his arm. Everything very quickly after that goes fuzzy and then black.

*

Hannibal is on his way back now from meeting with his friend with the plane, to whom he had explained simply that he has some relatives in France he wishes to surprise with a visit from himself, his fiancé, and their new child since they had expressed their regrets that they would not be in attendance for the birth. He is still about half an hour’s drive from town when he realizes something is off. He had thought nothing of the sleek, expensive black sedan he had noticed a few car lengths back earlier this morning on his way to the meeting, assuming it to be a commuter on their way to work or another engagement of their own, but to see the same car again so soon, returning to Baltimore at the same time as he? This is not a coincidence. This is premeditation.

He picks up speed and turns quickly to the right, onto a little used side road where he can easily pull off to the side into a thick growth of trees where he will be hidden. The black sedan follows and, no longer seeing him on the road ahead, speeds up as well and drives out of sight in an attempt to catch up. That is enough to tell Hannibal all that he needs to know. He starts the car and turns back onto the main road again, rushing back to Baltimore as quickly as he can without breaking any traffic laws that would risk delay if he were to be pulled over.

Nothing is amiss about the house when he walks in, except for the mingled lingering odors of intruders who should not have been here—predominantly Alpha and Beta pheromones, plus

one peculiar scent that seems *off,* almost rancid somehow. He moves even faster now to the kitchen.

The pantry door has been left wide open.

*

Will comes to in a giant four-poster bed, to the ambient noise of various monitors beeping around him and light streaming onto his face through the open window, the sun much higher in the sky than it had been when he left Baltimore. It makes everything about what he went through seem all the more wrong and impossible. Things like what happened to Will shouldn't happen to anyone in broad daylight.

He shifts to sit up in the bed, sore and still a bit hazy from whatever drugs they gave him. He can't recall much, having drifted in and out of consciousness the entire time, but certain things stick out in his memory—the deep red of the scrubs and surgical masks everyone wore, his own pained screams, the mixture of terror, relief, and elation at hearing soft, mewling cries...

He breathes in sharply, ignoring the wave of dizziness that hits when he tries to sit up faster, eyes opening wider. The blanket slips down far enough to reveal that he is shirtless, the swell of his small breasts that have grown out from his normally flat chest for nursing more obvious against the now much smaller but still noticeable paunch of his abdomen and the thick white bandages that have been wrapped around it. He touches the bandages with shaking fingers, gasping softly.

The door opens, and Will looks up to see the balding man looking down at him wearing the same unctuous grin. "Oh good, you're awake. Allow me a moment to go fetch Master Verger and tell him."

"W-wait..." Will says, voice hoarse and faint from the dryness in his throat. The man stops and turns around, glancing down at where Will's hand is still clutched over his own belly.

"Oh, don't worry your pretty head about that," the man titters. "It would have taken far too long to allow the birth to proceed in the usual fashion, and you may have noticed, Master Verger isn't really one for patience. A simple Cesarean procedure, that's all, nothing permanently damaging. Master Verger knows the value of a good breeder far too well to allow one to go to waste."

Tell that to Margot, whispers one dark corner of Will's brain, though her plight and his own are the last things he wants to worry about right now. He doesn't care about what's happened to *him,* he wants to know what's happened with his baby. Before he can get more than the first syllable of his question out, however, the man has already turned on his heel again and gone.

Will slumps back against the pillows and tries not to scream his horror and frustration out loud. He swears on his father's grave and every holy entity he can name, if someone doesn't bring in his child, safe and unharmed, and put him or her in his arms *very soon...*

“Where’s my baby?” he intones coldly as soon as Verger limps into the room with the other man still in tow.

“Margot’s looking after her for the moment,” Verger says, and Will lets out a rush of air he hadn’t known he’d been holding, relief because he didn’t imagine those cries or dream them up, she’s okay, *she’s alive,* and with someone who will keep her safe until he gets them both out of here. “I thought you and I could chat for a bit before I let them come in to see you.”

Will bites back the protest on his lips, knowing it will go unheeded and likely fill the other with sadistic glee to be able to deny him something. It likely fills him with glee *now* knowing how badly Will wants to see her.

“A girl child,” Mason continues. “I have to admit, it’s a little disappointing. Not that I blame *you,* of course. It’s not the sow’s fault if the seed is inferior. Oh well. We’ll just have to try, try again during your next heat.” Will is absolutely certain no amount of Alpha hormones could ever make it possible for Mason Verger to be able to sire offspring, but the fact that he wants to *try* and that he wants to try it with *Will* leaves a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach.

“But anyway, I’m sure she and Margot will get along famously. Margot is my *older* sister, you know. Papa was going to make her the heir, but then we got a little older and she presented as a Beta. He was *so disappointed* in her,” he says, as if it were somehow Margot’s fault. “Even an *Alpha* female would have been preferable, he said, even though they’re always barren. The shame of having a Beta child, the first one in our family for generations, *well...*you can imagine the indignity of it all.”

He could imagine it all too well, the indignity Margot must have suffered growing up in such a cruel, backwards household. “I bet you were the apple of his eye though,” Will says grimly.

“I was,” Mason says, preening at the ‘compliment’ although Will didn’t intend it as one. He sighs wistfully. “I used to think I was so special growing up, being an Omega like you. At least until Hannibal Lecter showed me what it really meant to get to be on top of the food chain.”

“And how did he do that?” Will asks carefully.

“Who do you think did this to me?” Mason asks, making a swirling gesture with his hand over his own face. “Imagine it, one day you’re belle of the ball and all the Alphas want to throw themselves at your feet. The next you look like something out of a B-horror show and the doctors tell you you’re lucky to ever be able to walk again.”

“So what is this? Revenge?” Will asks, trying to make sense of what any of this has to do with him.

“He took my Omeganhood from me, Mister Graham,” says Verger. “Took the fun out of it for me at least. Seems only fair I take his Omega from him in exchange.”

Will narrows his eyes at the oversimplistic explanation, because it’s more than that, more perhaps than Mason knows how to articulate himself. Kidnapping Will *and* his child, taking

Alpha hormones, the quip about being ‘top of the food chain’ that felt just a bit too on the nose to be accidental... “Are you...trying to *be* like Hannibal, Mason?”

Mason hums thoughtfully, one hand tucked under his chin. “You know, I hadn’t really thought about it like that before, but I suppose...yes!” he exclaims, laughing. “He just makes it look so fun, and I’ve been dying to try it out for myself, get a little taste.” This last he says with a significant look over Will’s exposed chest and skin and darts his tongue to lick where his lips should be. Will feels a deep, disgusted shudder arc down his spine, but he refuses to do anything that would outwardly show his discomfort like cover himself.

“He’s going to come here as soon as he realizes I’m gone. You do realize that, right?”

“Oh, he’ll get here alright, just not in one piece,” says Mason, giggling again. “See, I sent Mateo and some of the other boys to tail him and pick him up as soon as he’s alone. They’ll rough him up a little to be sure, truss him up, and then I’ll introduce him to my hungry, hungry little piggies out in the barn. *Actually though,* your questions just gave me a fabulous little idea. Cordell,” he says, and the balding man straightens where he’s been standing in wait, perking up like a puppy eager to please its master. “What are your thoughts on facial transplant surgery?”

“I would be delighted to try my hand at it, sir.”

“That’s the spirit, Cordell!” He turns back to Will then and asks, “What do you think about it, sweetie pie? How would you feel seeing me wear your boyfriend’s face while we dine on other parts of him together?”

Will makes sure to keep his own face carefully blank. “I couldn’t care less what you do to Hannibal Lecter,” he lies, betraying nothing of the dark churning rage roiling within him.

“Hell hath no fury, as they say,” Mason quips. “Let me just call Mateo real quick and make sure they don’t mess up his face too bad.” He pulls his cell phone out of his pocket again, turning away slightly as he dials. “Mateo! Yes, hi, I have some small changes to make to your orders if you haven’t already...slow down a minute, English, Mateo, *English!”* He straightens suddenly, his eyes taking on a frightened expression like a hunted animal. “What do you mean you *lost him?”*

Unnoticed by anyone else in the room, Will’s lips curve up briefly into a smirk before he schools his expression again.

“Well, why the hell didn’t you tell me this sooner?” Verger seethes. “No, just get back here as soon as you can and be ready for him to show up. You’ll be lucky if I don’t feed you to the pigs after this with him for your incompetence!” He hangs up, fuming. “Cordell, I’ve got to go check on a few things in the barn and make sure the other idiots are on high alert now. Put Mister Graham back to sleep for a little while for me, would you?” He glances over at Will and shrugs. “I’d love to trust you, sweetcheeks, but you know what they say about how fickle Omegas are.”

With that, he walks out of the room, leaving Will alone with Cordell.

“Alright, Mister Graham,” says Cordell, walking over to a cart of medical supplies left a few feet out of Will’s reach. Will would have made a beeline for it when he first woke up if he thought he had enough time and strength to get out of bed. He feels a lot stronger now than he did just a few minutes ago, thanks to the drugs wearing off and the spike of adrenaline coursing through him.

He observes from his vantage point on the bed, cataloguing each of the tools laid out on the cart while Cordell picks out a small bottle and a syringe.

“Same routine as before. It’ll go much easier on you if you don’t struggle,” says Cordell, obviously unconcerned by any danger a drugged-up, unarmed Omega who recently gave birth might pose, particularly one he easily injected without difficulty before.

Will sits placid and still as the man approaches, even turning his left arm over palm up as if offering up the vein in compliance.

Once he gets close enough and leans into the Omega’s space, Will strikes.

Stumbling out into the hall a few minutes later, blood dripping down his chin and wearing only a pair of pajama bottoms and Cordell’s large oversized coat, Will makes his way toward the back of the house. He could still try to find Margot and the baby and just get out, make a run for it and try to escape. He has no idea how far they would get though with Verger’s men crawling all over the place, and one thing he’s decided in the minutes that have passed since he woke up—for the sake of everyone he loves and holds dear, Mason Verger cannot be allowed to get out of this alive.

*

Hannibal Lecter is done with keeping a leash on the beast within.

This is not the time for his usual theatrics or showy displays of dominance. His objective now is exceedingly simple—rescue his mate and kill anyone who shows the slightest inclination for getting in his way. With that goal in mind, he picks up the first tool he finds within reach in the garden shed and walks right in through the front door.

He swings the claw end of the hammer straight through the temple of the first of Verger’s goons that he comes across before the man even has time to raise his arms in defense. The next two are a bit luckier and manage to land a few punches and blows of their own before they too decorate the end of his hammer with more blood and brain matter. Another one smarter than the rest tries to tase him right off the bat rather than fight hand-to-hand. They must have all been ordered by their fool of an employer to try to take him down alive rather than kill him.

Hannibal breaks the man’s arm when he lunges with the taser, before dispatching him as well. By the time he climbs up the stairs, he has a smattering of small bruises and scrapes and is thoroughly spattered in blood, most of it not his own.

From there, it’s a matter of opening every door and checking every room in his search. In one he finds an unmade bed, but what gives him pause is the scent that hits his nostrils as the door

opens, of blood and amniotic fluid and *Will.* His grip on the hammer tightens convulsively before he steps inside.

On the floor on the other side of the bed lies a dead man Hannibal has never seen before. His throat has been ripped out, with someone's teeth by the looks of it. Hannibal cocks his head to one side and allows himself only the briefest moment to imagine what happened and store the imagery away in his mind palace, a proud smile playing over his face, before he quickly moves on.

After several more peeks into other rooms, he still has not found Will, but someone else of equal importance.

"Shhh," Margot continues to rock the blanket-wrapped bundle in her arms, her back turned to the open doorway. "We're okay, princess. It'll be just a little while longer, okay? Until all the bad men are gone."

"I hope I am not one of those bad men you are referring to, Margot."

Margot stiffens. The babe in her arms makes a loud, fussing noise, as if in reply to her father's voice.

"Margot," he repeats her name icily when she continues to stand with her back to him, frozen as if she has forgotten how to move. His fingers flex minutely around the hammer before loosening their grip.

The Beta turns around slowly then, breathing in shakily and pulling the child even closer to her reflexively when she sees the state of his appearance.

"Thank you," he says in a carefully measured, even tone. "For your care and support in my family's time of need, Margot. Now give me my daughter."

For a few long seconds she merely stares, seemingly reluctant to comply. He fingers the long handle of the hammer idly, wondering if she will really make him use it. Finally she steps forward, leaning in to allow Hannibal to take the baby from her with his free arm.

"Just try not to get any of that blood on her," she says, masking her fear behind her usual spitfire attitude. "Pretty sure that's not good for a newborn's health."

Hannibal gazes down at his daughter's tiny pink face for the first time with a feeling of breathless wonder. "Thank you, Margot," he says again more gently.

He leaves the room without another word to her, his sleepy child in the crook of his arm and the bloody hammer in his other hand.

*

"Why the *fuck* is no one answering, Carlo?"

The gruff Alpha ignores his employer and continues speaking in Italian into the walkie-talkie in his hand, an unholstered pistol out and pointed to the floor in his other hand. Mason

frantically paces around, making the floorboards of the deck creak, which seems to antagonize the pigs in the pen below and make them snuffle and grunt more angrily. Carlo stands close to the railing and keeps glancing down at them, a nervous glint in his eyes that seems to get worse as his attempts to contact the others continue to go unanswered.

Will observes them both from the shadows, unnoticed yet. He wonders just how fast that large metal crane about shoulder-height and a few feet away from Carlo can turn, particularly if he spins the dial on the wall alongside him *just so.*

The mechanical screech of the machine coming on startles both men, and moves too quickly for Carlo, who stands dumbfounded, to get out of the way in time before it knocks him forcefully into the pen.

The agonized shrieks of terror and pain are the second-most horrific noise in the room. The first is the angry squealing of the sounder and frenzied shuffling of dozens and dozens of hooved feet.

Mason looks on and gapes, too afraid to move or speak. Will melts out from the shadows then, gaze cold and unyielding, and if his walk is slow because it has to be for him to keep his feet steady and balanced beneath him, Mason doesn't need to know that. If anything, it seems to intimidate him more.

It's only when Will stops, still a few yards away from him, that Mason realizes the gun fell onto the deck, not into the pen. Will's bare toes are almost grazing the barrel.

"N-now, now," Mason stammers, daring to take a few steps forward with his hands outstretched placatingly. "Let's not do anything hasty here..."

Will slides his foot forward another inch, and then kicks the gun sideways into the pen below.

"Oh," Mason breathes out. "Oh, thank god! Thank you. See, I knew you could be reasonable," he says, chuckling nervously and coming forward a few more feet, too focused on his own relief to notice when Will's hand disappears briefly into the outer pocket of his thick overcoat.

"You're a bully, Mason," he says in a low enough rumble that Mason has to lean ever so slightly closer just to hear him. "A bully and a boring coward."

The quickest flash of silver is all Mason has time to take notice of before the scalpel in Will's hand slices cleanly across his neck.

He stumbles and falls to the ground, clutching at his throat in a futile attempt to contain the gouts of blood spurting from it, scrambling away from Will as quickly as he can with only one hand to pull him along. Will makes no attempt to stop him, merely stands and watches impassively. The pigs snuffle and snort even louder, scenting even more fresh blood in the air.

A different sort of cry, faint compared to the rest of the din of the barn and warbling, has Will turning his head slowly.

Hannibal is standing there, eyes wet, the expression on his face nothing less than adoring and idolatrous, and carrying their child in his arms.

*

In all of his life, Hannibal has never seen anything so holy and perfect as this. Standing barefoot, most of the blood from the man he killed in the house wiped away from his chin but not all, overlarge black overcoat just open enough to reveal the bandage underneath and now spattered in the blood of another enemy, Will looks like some sort of dark avenging angel.

He remembers all those long months ago, when he had imagined he would never see a more beautiful sight than this same Omega covered in the blood of the Minnesota Shrike, and understands more truly now than ever before that he will never find another being on this earth who surpasses the exquisiteness and splendor of Will Graham.

Will turns to meet his gaze once the baby starts crying. The look that passes between them in that moment is electric and thrumming. Will's eyes flicker down to their little one then and soften.

"She doesn't like the noise," he says.

Hannibal's gaze shifts to her as well. "We should take her out of here then." He makes no move to leave yet though, waiting patiently as Will drops the scalpel to the floor and shuffles toward them both.

Another set of footsteps approaches, deliberately loud to telegraph their presence, and Margot comes into view at the top of the steps a moment later. She observes their reunion silently for a moment, then turns and begins walking toward her brother.

Mason reaches out for her weakly, breathing shallow and still bleeding out but not to the point of unconsciousness yet. She stops to pick up the scalpel on her way to him.

His fingers tighten convulsively around her sleeves when she plunges the scalpel into his chest, then loosen. It's only a couple more feet she has to drag him before she can push him up and over the railing. The pigs squeal excitedly once more, then quiet down as they tear into the second course of their feast. Margot rests her arms atop the railing to watch, her hair a halo around her face hiding her expression from view.

Hannibal and Will barely pay her any mind even when she turns around again and steps away from the railing, their heads both ducked as they raptly watch their now quiet, slumbering child. Distantly, the sound of sirens can be heard.

"Is that...*the police?* Are they coming here?" she asks in confusion and surprise.

"Yes," Hannibal answers without looking up. "They tend to do that when called."

Will raises his head to look up at the man, his expression unreadable.

"It's what any sane man would do, when he discovers his family has been taken," Hannibal explains, meeting Will's eyes with his own. "They also respond rather more quickly when an

irrational mate and father calls to tell them that if they don't arrive on the scene before he does, they'll have an even bigger mess to clean up afterwards."

"I can't tell if you're the most arrogant son of a bitch I've ever met or just crazy," Will tells him bluntly.

Hannibal responds with a wolfish grin. "Yes, I think, is the answer to that."

"Well, we should...*probably* meet them outside," Margot says, casting a quick glance at the pen behind her, tone careful and mildly perplexed as she obviously still has trouble wrapping her head around the fact that Hannibal actually *called the cops*.

The three of them begin making their way to the barn entrance. Will doesn't make it more than a few steps, however, before he starts to sway dangerously and Hannibal has to catch him with the arm not holding their child. *"Will!"* he says with mild alarm.

"M'alright. Think the adrenaline just...finally...wore off," he says, slinging one arm around Hannibal's shoulders, his words coming out slower and fainter as he forces them out past sheer exhaustion.

"Shit, that's right, I almost forgot you just...yeah," Margot says, quickly coming around to put his other arm around her own shoulders and support his weight from the other side. "Christ, how are you even *standing* right now?"

"Not too well anymore," Will quips.

With a little careful finagling, Hannibal passes their daughter back to Margot so he can lift Will up into his arms and carry him out of the barn bridal style.

"We need to get you to a hospital and have that incision looked at," Hannibal says as he starts guiding the four of them carefully out into the snowy yard. "Make sure you aren't suffering from any internal damage and haven't lost too much blood."

"You worry too much, babe," Will whispers, letting his head loll against Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal smiles down at him fondly, letting his cheek rest against the top of Will's head. *"My remarkable boy,"* he whispers into his hair.

They stand and pass the rest of the time in silence as the sirens and flashing lights get steadily closer.

Chapter End Notes

(Ok, so a certain somebody *may* have timed the call just right so there would still be time to get plenty of bloodshed in before the cops showed. ;D)

Other things that happened while writing this update:

Me @ Hannibal: ok buddy we get it, you really REALLY love Will Graham, now *fuckin' chill*
Hannibal: *looks extra impassive and unapproachable and stone-cold murder-y*
Hannibal: No.
Me: *meep*
Hannibal: *aggressively heart-eyes Will harder than he has ever heart-eyed Will before*
Me: ok WOW

We're in the home stretch now, you guys! :D

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

~~Oh god, I'm such a sap, don't look at me ok~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His daughter is still in the newborn ward when Jack comes in to see him, being tested and checked for any complications or injuries of her own, which logically he supposes he understands the doctors not wanting the parents to be in the same room for, but it had taken every ounce of his willpower to acquiesce and not hiss or claw at the nurse who had come in to take her all the same.

He has not seen Hannibal since the ambulance ride here. He understands from the whispered conversation the nurses shared when they thought he was asleep that Hannibal had tried to get permitted into the room during Will's examination, attempting to use his own medical background as leverage, but had been denied because the last thing the staff here wanted was an overprotective mate hovering nearby while they looked over his incision and checked him for internal bleeding or injuries. Will had smiled privately to himself, imagining the man's reaction and thinking it would do the Alpha some good not to get what he wanted once in a while. It would also do Will good not to see him for a bit. He still isn't sure he *wants* to see him now that the danger has passed, and has yet to decide what he's going to do about their whole situation.

Jack coming in to question him is almost a welcome distraction, and a good opportunity to organize his own thoughts about what happened and how he wants to present them. Katz and the others, he tells Will, are at Muskrat Farm to help keep the press from swarming in and crawling all over the scene while the local PD wrap everything up.

"Do you have any idea why Mason Verger chose to go after you?" Will shakes his head, and Jack sighs. "Hannibal said there wasn't much he could tell me either because of doctor-patient confidentiality, but what he could reveal was that Verger was often disagreeable and uncooperative during therapy, and that he terminated the sessions for both himself and his sister after Hannibal refused to disclose anything Margot would tell him in confidence."

"It was pretty apparent even from our brief meeting that he was very controlling over Margot's life," Will says, silently contemplating how good Hannibal is at spinning half-truths and evasions without seeming to do so, and then realizes his own answers so far have been much the same. "There's only so much even the best psychiatrist can do to help someone who doesn't want to listen, especially if they're only there to see him in the first place for the wrong reasons."

“True,” Jack says, nodding agreeably. “Guess there’s not much else to it. From the sounds of it, Verger was a real whack job,” he adds, and that’s it. No furrowed brows or suspicious glances, nothing to suggest the head of the BSU would even consider taking Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter’s word at anything less than face value.

“Is that your professional assessment, Jack?” Will asks with a wry smirk, and Jack chuckles tiredly in response.

“My professional assessment is this,” Jack says. “I can’t begin to imagine what the two of you must have been feeling while you were going through all that, or how you’re going to feel while you’re recovering, but I can imagine how I would feel if it were Bella and me in the same situation. There’d be more than a few cracked skulls in that scenario too,” he adds darkly.

“That would be called empathy, Jack,” Will says, and Jack chuckles again, more earnestly this time. That’s really all there is to it then, Will realizes. Hannibal Lecter, *known* killer of at least six to eight men since he started consulting for the FBI (depending on what the official reports will determine about Carlo and Mason’s unfortunate “fall” into the pigpen during that last “confrontation” in the barn), and Will Graham, known killer of at least two—Hobbs and Cordell Doemling—will both get off scot-free for murder because all of their kills technically qualify as justifiable defense of themselves or their loved ones.

The grandest irony of all is that Hannibal Lecter will be even *less* likely now to fall under suspicion for his other “hobbies,” not when he has close supportive friends like Jack Crawford to vouch for him. No one will ever take a second look at this loving and fiercely protective family man and make the connection between him and the aloof, grandiose high art of the Ripper murders.

Not as long as Will keeps his silence about it, that is.

“I guess you’re gonna want a longer vacation after this now,” Jack grouses good-naturedly, pulling an amused snort from Will before he slumps back and tiredly nods. “That’s fine. Really, take all the time you need.” He moves to stand then. “Tell Hannibal that Bella and I are both still looking forward to that dinner whenever you guys are ready for some company.”

“Jack,” he says right as the Alpha reaches the door. Jack turns with his hand still on the knob to look back at Will expectantly.

Will thinks about it for a moment, then swallows lightly and whispers only, “Thank you.”

Jack nods in acknowledgement, smiling. “You know where I am if you need me, Will,” he says, and steps out into the hall.

*

By the time they cart his little girl back into the room, fast asleep in the hospital bassinet, and declare a clean bill of health for them both, Will is ready to receive another visitor.

Doctor Farber walks in as the nurse leaves, still wearing her double-breasted winter coat and carrying her purse slung over one arm. She stops at the foot of his bed and puts her hands on her hips. “You were supposed to call when it was time,” she says, arching her brows exaggeratedly to make it clear that she’s kidding. “Do you know how it feels to get a call from the hospital receptionist and be told some petty butcher did your job instead?” She drops her arms and her joking demeanor then. “Seriously, Graham, how the hell are you holding up?”

“I’ve been better,” he admits, “but we’re managing alright.” He realizes he’s been picking idly at the bedsheet as he speaks, and stops. “The doctors here say we’re both fine.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” she says, muttering something about lousy hospital GPs and having to double-check their shoddy work as she pushes her glasses up and shrugs out of her coat, dropping it and her purse onto the nearest chair, and slips on a pair of latex gloves. It’s oddly relaxing to listen to and Will feels the corners of his lips tugging up once again in amusement. Everyone seems to have their own unique way of responding to the ordeal he just went through. Observing them has been a great way to keep from having to think too much about it himself.

He pulls open his hospital gown without needing to be asked, knowing she wants to take a look at the incision from his C-section for herself.

“I saw your mate out in the waiting room,” she says, surprisingly conversational for once. “He looked like he wanted to eat me alive when he found out they were letting me in to see you before him.”

Will laughs because he knows it is expected of him, even as he thinks silently to himself that he will need to make it perfectly clear to the Alpha before the day is out that Doctor Farber is *not* one to be put on the menu.

She makes an irritated clicking noise with her tongue between her teeth when she sees the cut itself. “I can prescribe you some lotions to help, but that is definitely going to scar.”

Will shrugs. His body is littered with enough scars that one more to add to the collection doesn’t bother him too much. She picks up his chart at the foot of the bed and looks over it while he closes his gown back up.

“Good news is that hack at least knew what he was doing well enough not to do any damage otherwise. You’ll have no trouble conceiving and carrying again if you want more kids,” she says, patting him briefly a couple of times on the hand without looking at him. “In case you were worried about that.”

“I haven’t had time to worry about anything like that, but thank you,” he says, swallowing. “That’s good to know.” His eyes stray back over to the bassinet, as they’ve been doing constantly since she walked in.

“May I?” she asks before going to the bassinet, but she doesn’t pick the baby up. Instead she simply reads what’s on the chart, listens to her breathing for a minute, and takes an armpit reading to check her temperature. She nods to herself then. “I guess the GPs here aren’t

totally incompetent after all. You should be released and able to take her home before you know it."

Will nods to show his thanks again. It'll be a relief to get out of here, change into some comfier clothes, and return to a familiar environment, even if he has to talk some things out with Hannibal before he can really relax and take comfort in being home.

The baby stirs and almost immediately begins fussing. Doctor Farber lets herself out with a few quick, simple words of parting, as Will's focus shifts entirely to picking her up out of the bassinet and cradling her gently in his arms.

*

Why is she even here? For at least the twelfth time Margot asks herself this, as she stands somewhere awkwardly near the vending machines of the hospital waiting room. Doctor Lecter stands over by the windows, hands clasped behind his back, gazing out at the parking lot several stories below. Very occasionally he strides slowly from one end to the other, his version of frenetic pacing she supposes, and it astonishes her to no end every time that he shows even that much of his anxiety so openly. He has hardly spoken a word to her since she arrived.

The cops had detained her for a few hours at Muskrat Farm, questioning her on what had happened as soon as the ambulance drove off with the little family inside. She told them she didn't know much, having been locked up in a room with the infant for most of the day until Doctor Lecter found her and let her out, and kept her answers as vague and undetailed as she could without being obviously evasive. As soon as they were satisfied enough to let her leave, she had got in her car and headed straight for the hospital, not really sure why, only knowing that she had nowhere else to go and couldn't stand being at the ranch for another minute. The only clear thought in her head had been that she should be at the hospital in case they needed her for anything.

Now she wonders if she hasn't made a horrible mistake. Seeing her here is probably the last thing either of them would want, too fresh a reminder of everything that just occurred. She hasn't even seen Will or the little one since the ambulance doors closed behind them, and Hannibal is closed off to her, unreadable as ever and clearly disinclined to make conversation. Maybe she should just leave, but where will she go?

"Are you here for Will as well?" Margot nearly jumps out of her skin at the softly spoken voice and turns around. A beautiful dark-haired Omegan woman in a floral wrap dress stands behind her, carrying two paper cups of coffee in her hand and wearing an apologetic smile on her face.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you," she says.

"Ah, no, it's okay. I'm just feeling…a little jumpy today," says Margot, resisting the urge to clear her throat in a decidedly unladylike fashion. "How did you know I'm here because of Will?"

“You keep glancing over at Hannibal like you’re worried he’ll bite if you get too close.” Margot giggles nervously at that and the woman leans in closer, smile widening, and whispers conspiratorially, “Truth be told, I’m a little intimidated by him too at the moment. I’ve never seen him like this before.” Margot thinks first about the sweet delicate scent of the woman’s perfume, second about how much more intimidating she would find Lecter if she had seen him before he found a change of clothes that wasn’t blood-spattered, and third that she is grateful she has a firm enough rein on her impulse control to keep herself from commenting on either of these things aloud.

“I’m Alana Bloom, friend of the family,” says the woman by way of introduction. “And you?”

“Margot Verger,” she says and watches as understanding lights the other woman’s eyes. “I’m not too sure what I am to them right now. An unpleasant reminder most likely.”

Alana shakes her head. “He’s been like this with everyone today. I know he might not seem like his normal self right now, but I’ve known him for a long time. So trust me when I say he’s probably more grateful that you came than he’s letting on,” she says with a wink.

“Tell you what,” she continues when Margot seems about to protest. “I bought this extra cup of coffee with Hannibal in mind, but I doubt he’d appreciate it much anyway to be honest, and you seem like you could use one. So,” she says, smiling again and holding one of the cups out for Margot to take, “help me out here and come sit with me?”

Margot cannot seem to help herself then. “If you’d told me this morning my day would end with an attractive woman buying me a cup of coffee, I wouldn’t have believed you.”

Alana giggles at that, their fingers brushing as the coffee exchanges hands, and Margot has the pleasure of learning the Omega blushes as prettily as she smiles.

For the first time in a long while, on the very day she has officially become broke and homeless, Margot Verger truly, genuinely smiles.

*

On most days Hannibal Lecter would consider himself a very patient man. It takes a great deal of patience and fortitude after all, to encourage some of his more reluctant patients to open up, to stalk his prey for days on end until he has thoroughly learned their routines before he strikes, to coax a certain recalcitrant Omega into a romance when he had been anything but interested when they first met.

Yet now here he stands, anxiously waiting to be permitted to see his beloved and half-seriously considering whether or not he should simply snap the necks of all the hospital staff on this floor and be done with it.

“Mister Lecter,” one timid nurse approaches, and Hannibal does not bother to correct her. He should perhaps be concerned that he is telegraphing his emotions loudly enough to be intimidating to the little Beta, but he cannot bring himself to care. The nurse smiles in a way that is meant to be calming and reassuring. “He’s ready to see you now.”

Thoughts of murder evaporate from his mind instantly. The nurse need never know how close she and her coworkers came to death as Hannibal thanks her and makes his way to the door he has been surreptitiously glancing over to at least once every few minutes.

Squaring his shoulders and smoothing a hand self-consciously down his shirt for a moment, he at last turns the knob and finally enters.

Once again he must correct his previous assumptions and completely restructure the walls of his memory palace, for *this* is the most beautiful sight he has ever witnessed. Softly humming a tune that may be another Patsy Cline song, or something else Hannibal is unfamiliar with, Will leans with his back against the pillows, cradling their little girl in his arms and gazing down at her adoringly as she sucks milk from his left breast. Hannibal breathes in deeply to take in the mingled scent of them both together and store it in a crystal decanter in the central room of his palace.

"You gonna keep standin' there mouth agape all day or come sit finally?" Will asks without bothering to look up, speaking in a low, even tone and not even trying for once to smooth out any of the dips and drawls of his accent. Hannibal closes the slight gap between his parted lips with a sardonic smile, eyes lowered to the ground, and obeys the subtle command by pulling up a chair close to the bed.

"I was uncertain of my welcome, in light of recent events."

"That guilty conscience finally kicking in, huh?" Hannibal subtly shakes his head.

"Not guilt precisely, no. Guilt would imply regret, which I find I am incapable of feeling when the wonderful results are here before me."

"You're really shit at this, you know. Kinda hard to forgive somebody who won't at least pretend to be sorry," Will says, giving him a hard look.

Hannibal swallows and glances down at the bedspread. It is he who finds it difficult to maintain eye contact for once. "I would not insult your intelligence by apologizing for my pursuit of you as a mate or the methods I chose to achieve it. Rightly you would not believe it, and even if you did I find that I can stomach lying to you, no longer." He lifts his gaze again. "I *am* sorry, however, for what this has cost you, and the pain and mistrust that now lies between us."

Will searches his gaze, looking for any hint of dishonesty, before giving a very tiny nod. "Any more crazy ex-patients I should be leery of popping up out of the woodwork?"

Hannibal does his version of a nervous fidget, worried that this may be the deal breaker that will cost him his Omega's trust and esteem for good. Will sighs and puts a reassuring hand on the Alpha's knee. "We'll talk more about that later and deal with them as they come," he allows, not sure if he wants a full accounting of everyone Hannibal Lecter has ever fucked over that may have an unhealthy grudge against him right now anyway. There probably isn't time enough in the day for that, and he wants to be home first. Will has a few ground rules to lay down before that happens though. He takes his hand back and returns to using it to support the other arm still cradling their daughter as she drinks.

“No more of your games,” he states firmly. “You’re a father now, Hannibal. You can’t afford to take unnecessary risks anymore.”

“You are right,” Hannibal agrees. “This incident has taught me that I have much more at stake now than I am prepared to lose.”

“And no more killing anyone for the terrible crime of missing a song note or insulting the pattern on your paisley fucking tie. You’ll have to deal with rudeness and life’s little indignities the same way the rest of us do, Doctor Lecter, are we clear on that?”

“Will—”

“I said, *are we clear?”* Will interrupts, eyes flashing with a dangerous glint that dares Hannibal to protest. A taut silence fills the air between them as he waits for the Alpha’s answer.

Hannibal in all honesty has been preparing himself for months for this scenario, among dozens of other possibilities, the day Will Graham would ask him to *stop.* He is no longer surprised to realize he will readily do anything to hold onto this family and the life they have forged together, even answer with a quiet rasp, *“Yes.”*

The Omega’s eyes widen as if he expected an argument despite the implied threat of reprisal if he dared. He has to close his eyes against the emotion that wants to well up at Hannibal’s easy acquiescence. He clears his throat. “Good, because as of this moment your choosing privileges have been revoked, Doctor,” he says, avoiding the man’s eyes to gaze down at his daughter once more instead. “From now on, *I* choose them.”

It is Hannibal’s turn now to be stunned. *“Will…”* he says, barely recognizing the desperate, hopeful, breathless voice as his own.

“That means if I say no, that’s the end of it, no arguments, no discussion,” Will continues. “You won’t be cluttering our table with any more free-range rude, not when there are others far more *deserving* of our wrath to choose from,” he adds darkly. “Killers, rapists, and anyone else I won’t tolerate drawing breath within thirty feet of our child, or anyone else’s child for that mat—” The last of his words gets swallowed up by Hannibal’s tongue as the man desperately lunges forward to claim them with a searing kiss.

“It’s rude to interrupt someone,” says Will with a breathless, cheeky laugh as soon as their lips part.

“You magnificent creature,” Hannibal growls against his lips, one hand tightly fisted in Will’s curls. He pulls back reluctantly only when their daughter finishes her meal and releases her mother’s nipple with a fussy snuffling noise.

“I gotcha, baby,” Will mutters, shifting her in his arms to pat her on the back until she releases a few good solid burps.

“We have yet to discuss what we should name her,” Hannibal points out.

“I was thinking...we should name her something in honor of those we’ve lost.”

Hannibal swallows lightly. “You wish to call her Abigail,” he states softly. Will nods. “Her namesake would be pleased with that, I think,” Hannibal says. He leans in closer and runs a gentle finger over her soft cheek. “Welcome to the world, little Abigail.”

“Welcome to our family,” says Will, “Abigail Mischa Lecter.” He looks up at the sharp inhalation of breath next to his ear. Hannibal’s eyes are wet as he gazes at the younger man.

Will scoots over to make room, and Hannibal accepts the unspoken invitation to climb into bed next to him, wrapping one arm around the Omega’s shoulders and laying his other hand on his knee. The two of them lean into each other and let their heads rest against one another’s as they continue to gaze down at the precious baby girl in Will’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

Woo, we're almost there! Next up will be an epilogue with a big time jump, but DON'T PANIC, OK? It's just because I'm saving all the best moments in between for the upcoming "sequel" of sorts...

...what, did you REALLY think I was gonna be able to let go of this verse that easily?? ~~After something close to two years of my life invested in these characters and in this universe in particular, I don't think so, buddy.~~ Stick with me, dear readers, we're in this for the long haul! ;D

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometime far in the future...

He watches the partiers dance and gyrate around one another, some of them wearing glowing bracelets and chokers, making their movements from this distance appear all the more exotic and beautiful and obscene to him. There are people milling about in and out of the barn, cars parked and kegs of beer all over the place, so his truck idling a few yards back, headlights off, somewhere near the treeline draws no attention to itself here.

He has been sitting here in the dark for hours now, watching, waiting. He has no fear of being caught. No one has ever noticed him before; no reports matching his description or his truck's have been made, despite the growing number of girls who have gone missing or washed up ashore along the bay during these last few months. The police have put out all kinds of warnings, of course, urging the youth of the cities and rural areas nearby to stay safe and be vigilant. Like always though, nothing comes of it. One thing that can always be relied upon is the arrogant, persistent belief of all teenagers and twenty-somethings that they have nothing to fear, that they are immortal and nothing bad could ever possibly happen to them.

If they had just stayed pure, he thinks. If they would just be good, obedient, studious, cautious, just as he knows their mothers must have surely taught them. He wouldn't have to keep doing this if he could just find *one,* just one girl who hasn't fallen, who hasn't turned to wickedness and shamelessness, just one girl clean and wholesome enough to become a good wife. But they never are. None of them ever are. Whores of Babylon, the lot of them, and on he must send them to where they truly belong so he can continue his search anew another night.

A quick rap against the driver side window startles him from his thoughts, his heart beating rapidly in his chest before he calms himself. He hadn't noticed anyone approaching and curses himself for the lapse in awareness. Warily, he rolls down his window.

The girl is slight and petite, the shadows outside mostly obscuring her features to him, but he can see well enough to make out the shape of her dress which almost reaches her knees—still too short for his liking, but more modest than many of the others he's noticed out tonight in spite of the cold—the long thick curls worn loose around her shoulders surrounding a tiny heart-shaped face, tall knee-high boots, and a thin jacket around her shoulders which she clutches tightly closed with one hand, huddled within it and shivering. A surreptitious sniff of the air between them tells him that she is an Omega.

"H-hi," she says in a sweet, lilting voice, stammering because of the cold or her own nerves or possibly both, and he finds himself instantly charmed. Hopeful, even. "S-sorry to bother you. I, um, I noticed you sitting in your truck and thought you might be leaving and…um…"

“Do you need a ride, sweetheart?” he asks, all charm and confidence now that he knows it’s just a frail little girl he’s dealing with. Even better, he suspects she might be just what he’s been looking for.

She nods her head eagerly. “If…if that’s alright with you.”

“Of course it is. Hop on in,” he tells her with a grin, pressing unlock on the doors. She bends her knees in an excited little hop that might just be the most adorable thing he’s ever seen.

“Oh, you’re a lifesaver, thank you so much! Thank you, thank you!” She scurries around quickly to the other side and climbs in, and he wastes no time locking the doors back and turning on the headlights before driving off, eager to make off with his prize as soon as possible before anyone notices.

Seeing her up close now, he can see that she is in fact quite pretty, with sun-kissed skin, hair a lovely deep chocolate color that falls in gentle waves around her face, and the most astonishing set of eyes he’s ever seen—they remind him of the glittering garnets in his mother’s birthstone ring, the one he still keeps in his bedside drawer, and he wonders if this isn’t a sign that his nights of hunting are finally over.

“Thank you again,” she says, running her hands up and down her arms to stave off the cold. “It was freezing out there!” He notices for the first time that she is wearing a hunter-green fishing jacket with gloves the same mauve shade as her too-short dress and laughs at the incongruity of the whole outfit.

“Maybe you should have dressed a little more appropriately then,” he says, eyes lingering at the exposed skin of her long legs between the hem of her dress and the tops of her brown boots.

She giggles, twirling her hair around her fingers in what appears to be a nervous gesture, biting her lip. “Probably,” she admits. “My friend kind of, um, dressed me up for the party.”

“Ah,” he says in understanding, feeling a quick swell of relief as one of the largest points against her is satisfactorily explained. He thinks on how many good girls have been led astray before by the influences of their fallen friends, and how fortunate it must be that he caught her when he did, when she still has the ability to blush over her poor choices and feel guilt and shame over them.

“I was supposed to ride home with her but…” Here she frowns fretfully. “I couldn’t find her anywhere. I think she left without me.”

He makes a disappointed clucking noise between his teeth. “Well, she doesn’t sound like a very good friend for you anyway. A proper lady would have stayed to make sure you got home safe. She shouldn’t have left you all alone like that. It’s dangerous out there for a pretty thing like you.”

“Lucky I found you when I did then,” she says, smiling shyly.

“Lucky indeed.” She’s doing very well so far; he has such high hopes, higher than he’s had in a long while. But now must come the next part of her test. “I have to ask, do your parents know where you were tonight?”

She laughs at that, far less shyly than before. He frowns a little, unnoticed. “How old do you think I am?” she asks amusedly. “I’m not some kid who snuck out past her bedtime. I’m twenty-two, mister!”

“You are never too old to show respect and consideration for your parents,” he says, in far less good cheer. “You are unmarried, are you not?”

“I…*yes…”* she answers in apparent confusion.

“Then you still answer to your father and mother foremost in all things.”

She blinks slowly at him once. “My dads would disagree with you on that actually. Well, one a little bit more than the other probably. One of them is a bit of a control freak sometimes,” she confesses with a wry smirk. “But for the most part they’re both pretty good about understanding that I’m an adult now and capable of making my own decisions.”

He makes a disgruntled noise at that. Clearly they trust her too much, he thinks, when this is the kind of lifestyle she falls into under her own devices. It’s another point against the Omega, and he taps his foot against the floorboard anxiously, faith floundering, worried that this will be another failure after all. There is still another test, however. He forces himself to still his leg and breathes out slowly through his nose.

“Hey,” she says, placing one hand gently on his knee. “I’m sorry if I upset you,” she says, looking up at him coquettishly through her eyelashes. “Pull over and let me make it up to you?”

He swallows and stops the truck abruptly, grateful that they are still out on a dirt road in the middle of the woods and haven’t reached the highway yet. Eager anticipation and bitter disappointment rise up in him in equal measure. Another whore like the rest of them, another failure before she has even begun her other tests. He will indulge the whore just like he has all the rest, enjoy her body and her services in one final sweet parting before sending her off to the depths below. As much as it disappoints him to know he still has not found the right one, a thrum of excitement sings through him at getting to indulge in two of his favorite activities tonight after all.

The truck has barely stopped before she climbs into his lap, her foot kicking the switch to the headlights on accident and flicking them off. She giggles again and he forces himself to smile in response.

She stops his hands as he reaches out to pull up her dress with a surprisingly strong grip. “Allow me first,” she says, smirking, and immediately starts undoing his belt. So she’s one of *those* whores, surprising after she had seemed so shy and innocent at first. It just goes to show you never can tell with anyone these days.

She encourages him to raise his arms and he thinks at first that she's going to remove his shirt next, until she abruptly wraps his belt tightly around his wrists without warning and fastens them to the safety handle above the door. He immediately tries to pull his hands away and finds that he can't; he feels helpless in this position, powerless, and *oh, is the bitch going to pay now for that.* Still he tries not to let his panic and discomfort show, projects a calm and joking demeanor as he says, "No offense, but I'm really not into this kind of play."

Something subtle in her face changes. Where it had been so expressive a moment before, it is now eerily still and unreadable. "Neither were those other girls you killed," she states calmly, then grabs the loose seatbelt dangling near his shoulder next and wraps it securely around his neck, tying it off around the back of the headrest. He can still breathe, just barely, but can make no noise. He starts flailing around anxiously to kick her off but only succeeds in making the belt dig more painfully into his throat.

Her smirk returns as she leans forward again and tells him with exaggerated innocence, "My daddy always warned me about boys like you."

From the inside of her boot, she slides out a slim hunting knife strapped to her leg. "Fortunately, he also taught me everything that he knows."

*

The house is dark and quiet by the time she arrives. Quietly she sets her suitcase and backpack down in the foyer and walks into the kitchen with the small cooler in her other hand.

She turns on the light and heads straight for the fridge to unload her burden there, standing with the door ajar as she begins unpacking its contents.

"You're late, young lady." Abigail nearly jumps out of her own skin, chastising herself internally for the split reaction, and shuts the refrigerator door quickly to glare at the man lounging casually against the counter on the other side of it.

"Pops, *don't do that!"* she says. "And, no, I'm not. I told you I had stuff to do before I got in. That's why I asked you not to pick me up at the airport."

"You were quite productive, I see," he says with a glance at the closed refrigerator door. "Though I don't see why it could not have waited until you were already settled in at home. We might have even gone as a family together."

"That's exactly why. I didn't want you and Daddy hovering nearby. It wouldn't have been nearly as successful as a family outing, trust me."

The Alpha hums noncommittally. "At any rate, it's true you did not specify how long these errands would run. Judging by the unreasonable hour though, I would say this does still qualify as *quite late."* He smirks. "I would be willing to overlook this tardiness in exchange for a more proper greeting, however."

She rolls her eyes, but the soft smile on her face belies any rude interpretation as she sets the cooler down on the island countertop and turns to hug her father. “Hi, Papa,” she says with her chin on his shoulder. This close, she can see which strands of his sandy hair are starting to turn white.

“Welcome home, my Abigail,” he says, returning her hug just as warmly. “Come, I’ll help you carry your bags upstairs.”

They continue murmuring quietly to one another as they reenter the foyer to collect Abigail’s luggage, though clearly not quietly enough as the stairway light flickers on. “Is that my Abby I hear?” asks a voice from above.

“Daddy!” she exclaims, forgetting her indoor voice for a moment, and rushes more quickly up the stairs to meet him halfway and throw her arms around her mother.

Will chuckles at the exuberant response. “Hey, honeybear,” he says, ruffling her hair affectionately as he hugs her back. The years have been kind to him as well, showing only a small smattering of new laughter lines and the vaguest hint of greying around his temples.

Hannibal looks on at them both from the ground floor below. Some fathers might become distressed to see such visible signs of favoritism in a child for the other parent, but Hannibal knows his children don’t love him any less than Will. They are simply often more reserved with him, understandable behavior when he is quite frequently regarded as the stricter disciplinarian of the two, though this is not always the case.

“Where’s Neddie and Izzy?” she asks once she pulls back enough to look up at him properly.

“Your brother’s already in bed. He has band rehearsal early tomorrow morning.”

“Cough, nerd,” Abigail mutters audibly into her loosely closed fist. Will just gives her *a look* over the rims of his glasses. “What? It’s a term of endearment,” she explains sweetly. “Just ask him when he wakes up.”

Will rolls his eyes. It’s clear where their eldest gets most of her mannerisms, though in many ways she’s actually more like Hannibal, more outgoing and extroverted for one. Ned is the one actually most like Will in personality, the soft-spoken Beta often happiest sitting alone up in his room rather than socializing with anyone. And their youngest, well…

“Izzy’s sleeping over at a friend’s house,” Will finishes.

“Whoa, *hold the phone,”* Abby says with exaggerated astonishment, splaying her hands out in a grand stopping gesture. “You mean to tell me she’s *actually* not grounded for once?”

“She’s actually calmed down quite a bit in the last few months,” Will tells her.

“I said she would grow out of it eventually,” Hannibal adds, climbing up the stairs behind his oldest daughter and setting the suitcase down on the step beside him. “Just a little pre-adolescent dominance fighting until she learns to get a better rein on her temper. I went

through the same thing when I was her age." Will levels the same look at his husband that he had at his daughter not a moment before.

"We don't know that she's an Alpha," he says in a tone that makes it clear they've had this exact conversation many times before. "We won't know until she presents."

"Have I been wrong yet, my dear?"

"Abby, will you tell your father to stop being an insufferable know-it-all?"

"Hey, Pops..." Abby begins. Hannibal puts on his best 'stern father' expression and Abby stops, biting her lip partly to hide a smile and partly in memory of the times that expression would genuinely make her quake in her proverbial boots when she was younger. She turns back to Will and shakes her head rapidly, grunting between closed lips, "Nn-mm." Will sighs dramatically.

"Insufferable?" Hannibal asks with an arched brow, coming to stand next to Abigail on the same wide step so he and Will are roughly the same height and facing each other more directly.

"The worst," Will drawls, leaning slightly forward with one arm draped over the railing.

"Ugh, I'm gonna leave you two to your gross flirting and go to bed," Abby says, picking up her suitcase and climbing up the stairs past them. Both of her parents wish her good night without leaving the steps.

She continues down the hall, making sure to soften her steps as she walks past her brother's door, turning her head only once when she hears Papa murmur something indecipherable that makes her mother chuckle quietly.

Abby smiles softly to herself as she turns the doorknob to her own room. It's good to be home.

Chapter End Notes

Sure, sure, Will "won" the great debate about what their kids would call him and gets to be called Daddy most of the time...except when they really, really want something and it's time to turn on the ~~begging~~ ~~whining~~ ~~manipulative waterworks~~ charm and with big wet eyes and quivering lips call him *"Mama"* in that precious little Lithuanian lilt just like Papa taught them. They use it sparingly so it doesn't lose its potency, and Will melts every time. ;)

The kiddos' names:
Abigail Mischa
Ned Robertus

Isabella Phyllis (named doubly for Bella Crawford, with some attempts to call her "Bella" when she was younger but it never stuck, so "Izzy" she became)

So that's it, that's the story. Thank you so much for sharing in this incredible journey with me! And as I stated before, there is a "sequel" planned, though I use air quotes there because it's not a true sequel in the traditional sense. What I plan instead is to publish a series of one-shots all under the same fic so they're easy to keep track of, nearly all of which are likely to take place between Chapter 29 and the epilogue.

There are a lot of *great moments* in between that we haven't seen yet after all, such as the wedding, all those little "baby's first ____" and so on...

...and yes, that also means I might be willing to accept a few prompts for this verse, as long as they'll stay in keeping with everything else I have planned. ;)

I'll see you all then! ^_^

End Notes

Never thought I'd find myself writing something in the Omegaverse, but this story wormed its way into my brain somehow and wouldn't let go. I've made some pretty big key changes to the A/B/O dynamics, most of which will be explained at some point in-story, but I'll talk about them in the notes as well later on if necessary.

This is the first fanfiction I've ever posted and it's not beta-read, so I'm pretty nervous here. Please let me know what you think! Constructive criticism is welcome, just please remember that I'm a newbie at this. ^_^

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!